

Partisan Review

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1969 LC:73-88790 768 pages illus. Slipcased \$17.50 (\$20.00 after January 1, 1970)

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With an Introduction by
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Partisan Review announces that Philip Rahv has resigned.

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NOTES

America I is the first of a series. America II will come out in 1970. . . . JAMES GILBERT is working on a book on American political theory. . . . JOHN FRASER is on sabbatical in Mexico this year. He teaches at Dalhousie in Nova Scotia. . . . "Journal of Daniel" is CAROLE KOHANIM's first published story. Miss Kohanim graduated from Sarah Lawrence last year, and is leaving the U. S. this winter to live in Israel. . . . JOYCE CAROL OATES teaches at the University of Windsor. Her latest novel was *Them*. . . . BUS is an Italian artist. . . . Farrar, Straus, and Giroux is bringing out CECIL M. BROWN's *The Lives and Loves of Mr. Jiveass Nigger* this winter. . . . RICHARD WASSON teaches at the University of Illinois, where he is co-editor of the *Laputa Gazette* and is active in the New University Conference. . . . JUNE JORDAN teaches at Sarah Lawrence and in the S.E.E.K. program at City College. Crowell just brought out her booklength poem, *Who Look at Me*. . . . Actors Studio has recently done one of MARTIN DUBERMAN's short plays, *The Colonial Dude*, and another, *Metaphors*, is about to go on an extended tour of Central Europe and the Near East. . . . New Directions is bringing out DENISE LEVERTOV's latest book of poems, *Re-Learning the Alphabet*, this spring. Miss Levertov will be teaching at M.I.T. this year. . . . ROBERT CREELEY's *Pieces* just came out. . . . Chez Max is JEFFREY APTER's first published poem. Mr. Apter is a young singer and actor, who has appeared

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Surrealist Poetry in France

by **J. H. Matthews**

Surrealism, because of the urgency and even brutality with which it has asserted its claim to make poetry a vehicle for its own ideals and because of its lack of concern for the ideals of the past, has had an impact unequalled in our time by any other literary concept.

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THE STATE OF THE UNION

THE LEFT YOUNG AND OLD

In America, politics is one of the strangest and most significant of the new growth industries. It is the sector of the political economy that has been able to absorb the threat of violence and change. In the past ten years especially, new forms in political and social manipulation and in consumer technology have been suggested by the growth of a political subculture. There can be no doubt that the cultural and political radicalism created by the New Left and the Black Movements, as they brought underground music, language, personal styles and even political vision together, was intended to be a confrontation with society.

Until now, however, such confrontations have been more suggestive than destructive. New forms of political cultures have been absorbed into old politics, like chemical preservatives added to stale ideas, in a process natural to a society in which the impulse to use is almost entirely subordinated to the impulse to consume. The most striking characteristic of modern industrial society thus appears to be the ability of established politics and high fashion to absorb their most perceptive critics.

It is difficult to understand the origin, the present dilemma and the future of the New Left without understanding the extent to which the rest of society has tried to manipulate its development. From its beginnings in the early sixties, the Movement has been aware of how difficult it would be to preserve its integrity, how important it was to struggle against the whole of American culture. It has long discussed the danger of "co-optation." It has realized that absorption into the mainstream of American politics means the death

of independence. For it has seen this happen in the slow descent of the Old Left into Liberalism.

But the New Left had to struggle with more than co-optation: it has had to contend with an older generation's purposeful misinterpretation. Its romanticism, isolation, innovativeness and spontaneity have been made to seem the special province of youth. But there are strings attached by this culture to its worship of the young: the celebration of youth is a dissipating enterprise — hopefully, one where the energy of political morality will be exhausted in a frenzy of commercial activities.

The New Left, however, is an intersection of politics and culture far more radical than society's dismissal of it as a youth movement. It is a political movement which has roots in a cultural revolution — a revolution in music, drugs, films, to some extent in fashion and in a whole range of anti-middle-class mores. It is also a cultural movement which is deeply political, and one which has become aware of the limitations of its base in the youth elite. What any society needs periodically — a temporary radicalization of portions of its elite — America tried to accomplish through the New Left. At the same time it recognizes that such a movement can be dangerous, and so simultaneously seeks to isolate it by calling it immature. And to some extent the Movement has caught itself in the definition of a "generation gap," flailing at old age as if senility were more dangerous than imperialism or racism. At times too it has reinforced its elite position by limiting its demands to the university.

In the past two years, however, the New Left has attempted to establish a more serious-minded radicalism, one which rejects the Movement's special place in society and which moves beyond the political isolation of a youth movement. It seems clear too that during this time the political establishment has not been able to find much in SDS or SNCC to absorb. Further, the most energetic liberal interpreters of the Left have, like Robert Kennedy, been assassinated, or, as in the case of Eugene McCarthy, now disdain the role of political broker. There is now a profound gap between liberalism and the Left, and no one remains to bridge it.

Clearly, the revolution to which the Movement now aspires cannot be dismissed as a momentary cleansing of the Establishment.

Anti-imperialism, after all, is not the base of a new suburban coalition. The dream that radical young people might grow up is pretty much over — ironically, even the mass media's caricatures of radicalism have helped the Movement expand. Institutions like the university, which in the middle sixties bent slightly to accommodate dissent, have now fallen back on police power to enforce order in the classrooms. With the background of urban disorder — a sign of the disintegration of national institutions — with the country losing a major war, further disruption is found intolerable. At the elite levels, in the universities and to some extent in other institutions, there is a profound polarization between radicals and the enforcers of law and order. The period of co-optation has ended in confrontation.

* * *

The bitter and confused split of SDS in Chicago a few months ago, and the emergence of sectarian groups within the Movement, reflect the pressure of this polarization. The alienation of radical students from the sympathies of the political and cultural arbiters of the nation, and the slow but steady movement in the general political climate to the Right, makes for an isolation which threatens the life of the Movement.

At this point sectarianism means a movement which can be easily repressed by the political establishment. Alternatively, a romantic revolutionism mistakes repression for the revolutionary moment, or reaches out too hopefully to other groups in society for leadership. And to fall back upon the traditions of the past with the intention of correcting the mistakes of the Old Left merely condemns one to repeat them. Even worse, isolation can mean a movement's becoming a kind of consular mission for someone else's revolution.

In effect, each of these alternatives is the same, for each accepts isolation and each substitutes ideological purity for creativity. There is, though, a real alternative to all of them: to work to reinforce all the New Left has meant, to preserve its spontaneity and to continue the slow and uncertain radicalization of American society. Although the language and leadership of SDS appear now to reflect a move to the first set of choices, it is not certain that the Movement as a whole will fall into the debilitating internal warfare which characterized so much of the history of the Old Left.

There is little in the current dilemma of the Left that recalls the origins of the New Left. Thus it is difficult to remember, to evoke, the *feeling* of the early sixties. There was the memory of the Chessman case, the sit-ins in the South were beginning, there was a vague awareness of the squabbling of the sectarian Left. There was little else, but there was a great potential: a profound distaste for middle-class life had found some expression in the emerging rock culture, and Black people, especially in the South, had begun to seize the direction of their own liberation.

There was also something deeply wrenching about growing up in the fifties and the early sixties. Much has been written about permissive parents: their behavior, so the theory goes, led their children to search for authority figures in leftist politics. But the theory has little relation to the psychological life in the fifties. Nor does it allow for the highly political form the young people's alienation ultimately took. For, as a great many people discovered, permissiveness only created the illusion of freedom. The bleak conformity of the fifties was repressive, just as, more openly, was the harassment of dissenters. The Cuban Revolution revealed America's apparently happy placid international family to be a mask for economic imperialism. And, of course, there was the bomb, which hung over everything as a kind of mad, ultimate threat against international misbehavior.

And even in those much discussed permissive families, permissiveness disguised a suppressed violence, and a hatred of youth, ready to explode, as Mayor Daley's city did later, against its aberrant youth. Early grants of consumer independence brought merely a thirst for real cultural and political freedoms. It is not surprising then that the New Left, in its early years, spent much of its energy in developing more indirect approaches to power, in short, in creating a whole new culture and a viable life *outside* established institutions.

In 1960 and 1961, one can see the beginnings of four movements, which include much of what is characteristic of the New Left even today. The most important was the sit-in movement in the South, which demonstrated the drive of Black people to end, at no matter what immediate cost, legal and social segregation. The impetus of Southern sit-ins at Woolworth's lunch counters spread North, though young white college students, while they knew Black

people in the South were contending with police and vigilantes, were at first hesitant about confronting anything so established as a dime store, even just with a sign. So there was for the first time the strange sensation of direct action and a vocal expression of dissatisfaction; and it came not from the Old Left, who were first encountered as they gathered to sell their papers to the student pickets—and who seemed curiously appended to the problems which unsettled the early sixties—but from the desire to push the Congress to pass some minimal civil rights legislation. Despite Liberal cautionings, the students on the lines were only acting on the Liberal promise of a democratic society.

At the same time, and again on the campuses, a few students and professors began to suggest a new radicalism, based on a rewriting of American history, and in particular, of the history of the American Left. In part, the direction was inevitable in the face of the Communist and Left Liberal's continual touting of the virtues of the thirties and the successes of the Popular Front. What remained of the Communist Party had pasted together a flimsy program, a "People's Anti-Monopoly Coalition"—a strange enough description, but particularly odd since it was used for the supporters of Hubert Humphrey and Walter Reuther. The attempts of the Old Left to maneuver the students' political action and the historians' curiosity into support for the Democratic Party raised a striking question: How did the major radical movement in the United States come to tie its fortunes to the principal political party of American Capitalism? And the mere asking of the question exploded the sterile myth of the Liberal-Reactionary, Democratic-Republican polarization of American society.

Since the end of the thirties, Liberal apologists for the New Deal had oversimplified and even distorted the divisions in American politics. The New Left historians (in, for example, the important work done at the University of Wisconsin in the early sixties often published in *Studies on the Left*) reasserted two vital complexities: that of a nonreactionary conservatism which looked to the decentralization of society, and which opposed the growth of bureaucracy (as both a political force and a political means); and that of an independent (indigenous) radical tradition which did not live in the shadow of the Soviet Revolution. In effect, the New

Left historians were suggesting that liberalism was not the enemy of capitalism, but was rather one of its political forms, and that a flexible reformist state was the greatest defense for private property. How strange it seemed, to find the conventional Left guarding the leftward ramparts of liberalism.

In another field, the same kind of criticism was being made. C. Wright Mills, like the radical historians, worked toward a critique of American political society through radical criticism of his colleagues, the sociologists. His analysis cut through the myths of liberalism to the one crucial question which had been dodged in those innumerable formalists' apologies for the American system — "Who rules?" Mills's concern for the workings of power led him to suggest that bureaucratic centralization grew almost inevitably from the modern reform movements, and that liberalism and communism shared an inexorable faith in centralization. But while Mills criticized the intellectuals for willingly serving the corporation, he placed a high value on their potential power as a social group. Mills's discussion of the power elite brought into question the role of the intellectual in social change in a way which immediately opened a debate on the New Left, a debate which has lasted for a decade.

There were other tensions in early New Left scholarship. While it was friendly to the professions and the University, it was potentially critical in that it saw the role they played in the defense of the status quo. Yet the first wave of activity on the campus was essentially reformist, aimed at improving student-faculty relations or at strengthening the liberal position of the University itself. And during the Vietnam teach-ins in '65, when faculties responded to the proddings of the students, and mustered academic power against the war, it even seemed that the University might remain base of operations for the Movement. But the debate has shifted grounds, as the University becomes more and more a battleground, instead of a neutral zone, of political activity, and the New Left more and more alienated from the radical professors. It is impossible at this point to believe that the University is solely committed to the transmission of learning.

The third radicalizing force was the Cuban revolution. The spectacle of the enormous weight of the American political economy seeking to change the direction and the scope of the revolution was

eyeopening. It was not Communism within ninety miles of the mainland but the naked operation of imperialism which impressed the students. Here was a revolution that was unexpected by the Old Left, and sometimes, it seems, unwelcomed. Yet only the Old Left seemed able to understand the revolution and the behavior of the United States.

So, for example, The Fair Play for Cuba Committee, begun as a left-liberal coalition, quickly evolved into a Trotskyist organization in 1961. For the Trotskyists were quick to seize upon what was new about Cuba, and to suggest a number of good reasons for the reactionary role of the Cuban Communist Party in the early days of the Revolution. Further, they offered a more revolutionary alternative to the American Communist Party. The Trotskyists recruited one small part of the first "generations" of the New Left, just as the Communists through their DuBois Clubs would gain a foothold in the Movement somewhat later, and as Progressive Labor would when it almost gained control of SDS during the past year. Thus, despite the distaste young radicals felt for the sects of the Old Left, their organizations played, though only peripherally, a formative role in the development of the Movement. After 1962, the Cuban revolution began to be seen as only one part of a larger uprising against American power, a peasant-based transformation of world society which began in China, which swept into Algeria, and then returned to Indochina. The Cuban phenomenon was no longer special, and the momentary success of the Trotskyists waned. But the lessons they taught were clear nonetheless: Old Left politics, based on the Popular Front, could distort, if not virtually paralyse, a revolutionary movement.

Energy for the Movement came from another direction too. Early in 1960 a demonstration in San Francisco conducted by students opposing the House Un-American Activities Committee turned into a minor police riot. HUAC then put together a film which doctored the events to suggest that the Communists had plotted to disrupt the committee. The film was immediately controversial, making the rounds of campuses and church basements across the country. The effect was striking. Students had to confront, for the first time in their lives, an official lie; then, the U-2, the CIA revelations and countless other admissions of subterfuge and misstatement.

The circles of discovery and exposure cut deeper and deeper into American politics, until only a thin, semi-opaque veil covered the activities of the government. But the immediate effect of the HUAC demonstration was to make the West Coast and particularly the Berkeley campus the center of New Left activities. This is particularly important because in the middle sixties San Francisco became a second cultural city, where the new politics merged with the new culture. A wider effect of the HUAC demonstrations—and the whole atmosphere which they created—was the growth of a new sort of underground journalism. *Ramparts*, its most commercialized form, was a slick amalgam of muckraking journalism and pop culture, in effect a professional mock-up of the broader movement of underground journalism which has begun to spring up around San Francisco, in the Midwest and in New York.

The discrediting of the House Un-American Affairs Committee, the sit-ins and the Cuban Revolution, all had an effect upon the small peace movement. In the fifties, anti-Communism and the willingness on the part of organizations such as SANE to press for an American-style disarmament program had effectively isolated the question of peace from other issues. The Student Peace Movement, most prominent in the early sixties, veered away from this single-mindedness, but not very far. Rarely did it link peace to other issues such as the fight against segregation, nor did it suggest the need for a radical transformation of the United States. True to its cause, it also remained relatively ineffective. But its very ineffectiveness raised another important question for the growing New Left. While the Communists and liberals pushed for a détente with the Soviet Union, they too wished to keep peace issues separate from other questions. The student left, however, increasingly saw the need to make peace into part of a larger radical program. On the campuses, the debate over peace often turned into a discussion of strategies, of the effectiveness of single-issue causes, and of the problems of working with liberals within the established framework of power.

In sum, the early sixties saw the development of patterns focused around several different issues, important for the growth of the New Left. Perhaps most important was the relationship of that segment of the New Left which was largely white and university-based to the Black movement, which had initiated a confrontation with

American society that has grown and deepened for ten years. White members of the New Left have been dependent upon the Black movement from the beginning, often adopting its tactics, its demands and its conception of American society. But the recognition of poverty and open exploitation demanded a different sort of movement from the early sense of the New Left as an uprising of students to reform the universities and academic disciplines. For from the first, the New Left has been aware of the inadequacies of its own base and of its isolation in society. At the same time, however, it has welcomed its special, privileged position in society. It has exploited America's real need for a trained technological elite, and its willingness to overlook what it interpreted to be merely youthful skittishness.

Further, the New Left was characterized by its vacillation about the old radical sects. While students neither needed nor understood old sectarian organizations or their tactics, they were inevitably attracted to traditional leftist literature. As a social model, the Soviet Union had little to offer (and the American Communist Party had nothing), but Cuba and China exemplified a new sort of revolutionary society, which, it appeared, even the Soviet Union opposed. And many of the pressures in American society which helped to create the New Left also worked on Old Left. It was perhaps inevitable that the Communist Party in the early sixties would suffer from splits and divisions over its conservatism and its defense of Soviet foreign policy, the most important of which was the establishment of the Maoist-oriented Progressive Labor Party in 1964. In the early sixties, the American Communist Party had become increasingly hostile to revolutionary movements in underdeveloped countries. Some former Communists, and sons and daughters of the Old Left, sought to form a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Party which would take the part of China in the growing dispute between the two international versions of Communism. The result was Progressive Labor. The Party's first two actions — an illegal trip to Cuba, and the May 2 Movement, which opposed the War in Vietnam on anti-imperialist grounds — brought it immediate attention on the New Left. Its third move was to enter SDS in 1966 as a left-wing faction, to raise the issue of socialism and imperialism, and to recruit in SDS's large, amorphous organization. While PL retained much of the style, the

language and tactics of the Old Left, since 1964 its influence grew steadily in the organizations of the New Left, until at Chicago, it claimed to represent the true spirit and organization of SDS.

The organization and development of the Students for a Democratic Society was the fusion of all of the early tendencies of the New Left. SDS emerged inconspicuously out of the youth affiliate of the League for Industrial Democracy. Until 1962, it was primarily a liberal student organization, which gave little indication that it would become radically opposed to American capitalism. Then, in 1962, largely under the inspiration of Tom Hayden and others at the University of Michigan, SDS published the "Port Huron Statement." The statement was, without a doubt, one of the most important political writings of the decade, a kind of declaration of majority by the New Left. It documented the failure of the American system, a broad failure to bring social and international peace and to end poverty and exploitation. And despite the strong advice of some of the statesmen of the anti-Communist Left, SDS refused to exclude Communists. The result was a decisive break with the spirit of the fifties, and a move toward a deeper discussion of American society and the international role of the American system. Organizationally, however, SDS did not follow up this statement with a more theoretical understanding of American society. It chose, purposely, to avoid ideology, allowing its activities to become the basis for its theory. Throughout the period, therefore, its theory often reflected the momentary demands of the Movement.

The refusal of SDS and the New Left in general to develop a broad theory of strategies and tactics during the early sixties reflected a revulsion to the rigid ideology of the past as much as the uneven development of a new radical tradition with roots in a middle-class student movement. In another sense, the absence of theory reflected a cultural indifference — a hostility to intellectual work — and an emphasis upon pragmatic success. Whatever the reasons, this reluctance to theorize has had a strong and contradictory influence upon the Movement. And ironically it led in the middle sixties to a running argument in SDS, a sort of metaphysical debate about theory itself: Should theory emerge from the activities of the movement or should it be the work of Movement-oriented intellectuals?

Without theory, SDS could move into areas largely ignored

by the Old Left: into community organizing and into experiments in local political control. The rejection of the classic leftist obsession with centralization opened up a number of important possibilities. Experiments in community organizing in the ghetto in 1963 became the basis for the Movement's emphasis upon decentralization and community control. The New Left saw that when local citizens struggled to control their own lives they were engaging in revolutionary activity. From this experience, a number of tentative theories about a "new" working class which included white collar workers, and about the spontaneous generation of revolutionary programs from local, radical actions, were proposed — theories which have their analogues in the theoretical writings of the European Left today.

More significantly, perhaps, the absence of ideology meant SDS was open to human values and humane relationships. The New Left was thus in a perfect position to absorb and even to aggravate the sense of alienation of a younger generation who felt a limitless hostility to American culture and to the places prepared for them in it. Committed to no one cultural style, the New Left could absorb the rebellious, and potentially political, energy of drug culture, of the music revolution, of movies and art. It became, in other words, a synthesis of radical politics and bohemian culture, an enormously creative but fragile fusion of politics and culture that appeared shortly before World War I and temporarily in the 1930s.

The absence of theoretical thinking, however, made for dangers which threatened the creativity of the Movement, for it led to a political vacuum which was to be filled to some extent by the Progressive Labor Party. Serious-minded, sloganeering, PL had little sense of the importance of the cultural revolution, of the origins of the New Left or, indeed, of the complexities of the ties of white radicals to the Black Movement. But Progressive Labor and the young PL members who entered SDS brought with them a sense of the universality of political struggle, and demonstrated the inadequacy of a purely student movement. They suggested that the movement seriously discuss imperialism and advanced forms of capitalism. But in the bitter ideological debates of 1969 as PL gained power within SDS, the regular members of SDS found themselves still badly in need of a theoretical foundation. The only possible answer for them was the expulsion of PL, not on the firm ground of a rejection

of what PL represents but on issues which seem largely peripheral. What remains in SDS is still, however, an ideological vacuum.

While the Movement's embrace of the cultural revolution reflected its openness and experimentalism, it was too quick, and so created for itself another serious difficulty. Drug and rock culture, the youth culture, is not an unadulterated blessing. For one thing, it depends upon a commercial structure that funnels its best products into advertising and show business. Most important, however, many of its assumptions are reactionary. The emphasis upon youth as a revolutionary force is too elitist, too self-absorbing, the political importance of young people throughout the world notwithstanding. Ultimately more disruptive, however, was the Movement's unconscious acceptance of those American social patterns which the cultural revolution has strengthened and even distorted: the celebration of the male, for example, in rock groups, in films, was now extended to radical politics. As the Movement attracted more young members nurtured in this culture, its tensions began to bear down upon women, whose new liberation seemed at times to mean only that they were now total sexual objects. The Woman's Liberation Movement grew, in part, from this pattern, and, quite naturally, it set off an acrimonious debate in SDS and other organizations. Although Woman's Liberation has since emerged as a major slogan of the New Left it is badly formulated and awkwardly proposed. More important, the whole debate signaled a turning of the Movement in upon itself. It was an admission of failure to create in the Movement itself a radically different culture, which could sustain humane relationships between its members.

Though the cultural movement was important, since 1962 the Movement has been oriented politically around two issues: the struggle for civil rights, which grew into support for Black liberation; and the opposition to the War in Vietnam, which emerged as a general attack on American imperialism. Each issue has become more clearly defined since the early sixties, and each has, at different periods, been the Movement's chief concern. They are essential to the programs of almost all New Left organizations today.

Historically, however, the Movement has been comfortable with neither issue. As the Black movement developed and matured, it became increasingly suspicious of the SDS-SNCC alliance of 1963

and 1964. At the height of the civil rights movement, northern white radicals took on integration, voting rights and other reform demands as their own. When in 1964 the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee issued a call for a Mississippi Summer project, almost a thousand students responded, and went to the South to help register voters. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party grew from that summer, and went to the 1964 Democratic Convention in Atlantic City with hopes of receiving delegation standing. Instead, they were met by a cautious rebuff. During the remainder of 1964 and 1965, it became apparent that the Johnson Administration, and even the liberal Democrats, were not going to use even the minimal legislation so far passed to enable southern Black people to achieve political influence in their home states.

This discouragement, coupled with two new factors, turned SNCC to a new orientation. One was the growing resentment toward allies who came to the South for summer work on civil rights, but then returned to the sanctuary of the university in the fall. Still more compelling was Watts in the summer of 1965 — the first major ghetto riot. The violence, and the killing of black rioters, put enormous pressure on black organizations to respond with some sort of defense. The slogan of Black Power, the emergence of the Black Panther Party and the breaking of SNCC's ties with white radicals were all reactions to the failure of the civil rights movement and the ghetto uprisings.

Although SDS had been enormously influenced by SNCC and by its experiments in community control (its understanding of American society had been deepened too when it realized the futility of civil rights action and integration) it was hesitant and uneasy about the Black movement. At almost the same time, the war in Vietnam became SDS's primary target, and a whole set of radical tactics were developed. Resistance to the draft was one of the first steps, with pressure put upon the university, or example, to refuse to cooperate with Selective Service. Other elements of the Movement took more drastic, direct action, burning their draft cards or refusing induction. In the winter and spring of 1966 and 1967, opposition to the war on the campus led to direct confrontations with recruiters from Dow and other manufacturers of war materials. While the university had treated draft resistance with limited sympathy, and some teachers had

refused to turn grades in to the Draft Board, as an institution it interpreted demonstrations against Dow and military recruiters to be a challenge to its own authority. The results were a disintegration of the student-teacher alliance over opposition to the war, frustrating equivocations by liberal faculty about the meaning of dissent and administration crackdowns. The acceleration of all this into the 1967 march and assault on the Pentagon — symbolized by placing the Cornell University flag on its walls — brought SDS and other Movement organizations national attention. It carried them abruptly into a confrontation with the converter of American capitalism, the bureaucratic grid that changes the energies of social inequality, racism and economic exploitation of underdeveloped countries into pure power.

SDS's enormous success in focusing student discontent over the war brought it great sympathy among students, and helped extend the Movement from the elite universities into the large state systems. That it shut down Columbia in 1968, Harvard, Berkeley, Wisconsin and many other institutions was a measure of its success. But in the long run these triumphs worked in reverse, for they led nowhere, except to a radicalization of the students themselves, based upon their growing frustration and isolation. Each successful assault meant an escalation in repression — first the police on campus, then chemical weapons and, finally, last spring at Berkeley, helicopters.

The Black movement too was polarized by its success-failures. The civil rights movement pried legislation out of Congress to help end legal segregation, but this achievement helped kill the movement in the ghetto. For legislation simply did not alter the terms of life in America, especially in the North. The Black Panther party grew up on the basis of organizational successes of other groups such as SNCC, but it had as well a highly militant, defensive posture, which appealed to the northern ghettos. With leaders like Eldridge Cleaver, the Panthers gradually took a radical position, based in part upon identification with revolutions in underdeveloped countries, and, particularly, with China. The Panthers' success in organizing led to the repression and arrest of their leaders. The stage was thus set for a new alliance between the Black movement and white radicals based upon the merging of two issues — racism and imperialism — into one program. Both movements projected a poli-

tical program that demanded the total transformation of society — self-liberation through social revolution.

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This history of growth, of success and failure, of the absence of a theoretical orientation, of increasing repression by society and of uneven and troubled relations with the Black movement has led to the present crisis in the Movement, a crisis which split SDS into two factions at their Chicago Convention in July. It is reflected in the hasty adoption of Old Left rhetoric by some of the leaders of SDS, and in the proposal of programs which differ substantially from the traditional stands of the Movement.

The split stems immediately from several changes in the Movement in this past year. One of the most important of these was the response to the June uprising in France last year. No single persuasive theory emerged from this deep social upheaval; what was important, rather, was the strong sense it afforded them of the opening of historical possibilities for America. The trembling French Republic was almost toppled by a spontaneous alliance of workers and students, which grew, not out of the plans of bureaucratic party structures, but from the needs of each group. This lesson came at a particularly important time for the Movement, for PL was advancing its version of a Worker-Student Alliance (WSA), and SDS was becoming isolated from the last of its traditional liberal allies. The tendency to think of the student movement as a revolutionary catalyst was strengthened by the long hot summer in France. France meant it was possible to bypass the barriers between classes, even, it seemed, in the United States.

With PL's obvious gains in the Movement, SDS needed a program which would commit the organization to serious revolutionary activity, and which could contain the growth of WSA. In December of 1968, the leadership of SDS passed a resolution, "Toward a Revolutionary Youth Movement" (RYM). "The main task," it proclaimed, "is to begin moving beyond the limitations of struggle placed on the student movement." Although the document itself outlined not much more than a new set of tactics, a profound shift in thinking lay behind it. RYM proposed that youth could not be considered a class in itself. The student movement, it contended, was narrow and weak; consequently, the approach to revolution

must be shifted to depend on other groups. The new movement would still include a large cross section of young people — quite naturally — and become a Revolutionary Youth Movement made up of students, young workers and young Blacks. But it was the working class and Black elements which promised to alter the class basis of the alliance, making it revolutionary, not reformist. The program still talked extensively about the university, but only to treat it as an extension of the capitalist state. Reform of the university was no longer a priority, but intensified action within it was — its admissions policies, its real estate and urban renewal manipulations, its counterinsurgency programs and all the other war services it offered were to be challenged. RYM was obviously a document produced by a movement which wished to outgrow itself, and become part of a revolutionary force. But at the same time, the program was ambiguous because it left so many questions unanswered. If anything, it added new fuel to the argument over the role of actual members of the New Left in a radical transformation of society. After ten years the fundamental ambiguity about the meaning of the New Left, and the usefulness of what it had accomplished, remained.

Changes in the Black Movement also greatly affected SDS and the factional fight brewing within it. The rapid growth of the Panther Party and its adoption of Marxist-Leninist rhetoric brought the fight against racism into a different perspective. Many members of SDS saw the Panthers as a vanguard, not only in fighting racism, but also in struggling against capitalism — and some even identified them with Third World liberation movements. Such arguments were obviously persuasive, for in the Spring of 1969, SDS endorsed the Panthers as the vanguard of the revolution. This intensified the factional disputes within the Movement, for PL challenged the designation, calling any nationalism, Black nationalism or Black Power, reactionary. SDS's focus on the Panthers had more complicated effects than simply giving factionalism an outlet. It has undoubtedly increased the sense in the Movement of a profound polarization in society, as it sees growing repression against its allies in the Black community. At the same time, the Panthers' politics, as the recent July Conference in Oakland, California against Fascism has shown, has led it to a position which currently sounds more like the Amer-

ican Communist Party than it does the New Left. It is unlikely that this is anything more than a temporary posture, but its immediate effect is to strengthen the language and the appeal of Old Left positions.

The enormous difficulties which the Movement faced as a result of its new political stance, and which it will continue to face because of its division into warring camps, was illustrated this spring at Columbia. After last year's amazing success, when SDS exposed the university's ties with the military establishment and closed it down in utter confusion, evoking enormous sympathy on the campus, its activities this year led to failure and defection. The administration at Columbia mustered a new arsenal of sophisticated legal weapons, and the faculty showed itself to be profoundly alienated from student demands. The factional fighting within SDS seriously confused and often alienated the student body. Thus, the effort to cement the ties of the student left with groups off campus, in the first instance, intensified the internal weaknesses of SDS and perhaps weakened its only secure university foothold. Nationally, the growing commitment to revolutionism was more than matched by a show of police strength, from Wisconsin to Harvard to Berkeley.

Many SDS leaders interpreted such difficulties as the work of PL. PL as an organized and powerful faction, which opposed the Panthers and which was hostile to the revolutionary cultural movement, seemed to be the greatest obstacle to extending the movement. When the SDS convention met in Chicago in June, it was probably inevitable that the organization would split. Only PL went to the convention with a unified position; the rest of SDS was divided into at least three important groups, which united only to oppose Progressive Labor. Thus PL forced the SDS leadership to make some hasty ideological commitments, which, though tenuous, are extremely important historically. Most important, however, was the decision that the life of the movement depended upon the purification of the ranks of SDS. For better or worse, SDS turned to cleanse itself, before it could face the task of creating a new democratic society.

There are now two organizations which call themselves SDS, one established at the National Headquarters in Chicago and based upon RYM and its allies, and the other, consisting largely of PL and its Worker-Student Alliance, with headquarters in Boston. Much of the confusion and bickering over the debris of the factional ex-

plosion at Chicago, its contending names, organizations and tendencies, results from the question of who expelled whom and which tendency represented a majority of the convention. There is no doubt that the RYM tendency represents a majority of the national SDS organization, not PL, but this is only a numerical superiority.

What is left of SDS (PL is still PL, whatever it chooses to call itself), is deeply divided. Moreover, the distance between the SDS leadership and campus organizations has probably never been greater. The most important faction is currently allied around the new leadership of SDS, elected after the split in Chicago, and particularly around the document, of which Mark Rudd of Columbia is one of the authors, "You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind is blowing." A second, much smaller group, RYM-II, is associated with former National Secretary of SDS Mike Klonsky. A third group is centered around the Independent Socialist Club, which opposes the first two groups on the grounds that they are "Stalinist." And then there are the local SDS organizations, unaffiliated and still recoiling from the political bust in Chicago, who have taken no firm stand.

If Weatherman is representative of the primary energy of what remains of SDS at the moment, as it seems to be, then the organization unmistakably has moved to create a program which will deal with the problems of the past year and the organizational crisis at Chicago. It reflects, perhaps inevitably, the desire to combat PL on its own ground, with Old Left verbiage. Simultaneously it seeks to shift the Movement from the campus to a head-on struggle with American capitalism. This is to be done primarily by changing the emphasis from SDS's earlier program in its university sanctuary to the creation of a revolutionary vanguard and, presumably, of a Marxist-Leninist party. Its theoretical program rests, significantly, upon those three areas which the Movement has underestimated in the past, or, it might be said, in which its failure is reflected. In one sense Weatherman's program falls upon the shoulders of the Black struggle, with the assertion that Black people in America are the revolutionary vanguard, and perhaps a sufficient revolutionary force even alone. The Black movement on the campus, Black caucuses in unions and other special programs designed to weaken institutionalized racism need support, the position continues, and it is

one of the functions of revolutionary youth to explain Black tactics to the white working class. Weatherman's second commitment works the same way. American capitalism, it argues, is a worldwide system which primarily lives off underdeveloped regions and its internal Black colony. Once more, the function of revolutionary youth is to tie the American working class into an anti-imperialist struggle led by forces in the ghetto and at the fringes of the American economic empire. A third, but somewhat less central proposition is the support of woman's liberation, interpreted as one of the principal goals of a socialist transformation of society.

It makes no sense to praise or criticize the specific proposals of Weatherman or the other two organized factions within SDS except in the most general way, because they are so new and so involved with the Chicago split. Nevertheless, the general sweep of the ideological discussion to date suggests a number of reasons for the transformation of SDS. Perhaps most important is the sense of frustration and disappointment created by its successes. The growth of SDS from a small, indistinct liberal group into the largest organized radical movement in the United States has had a curious effect. It is not one generation of students who have made up this movement, but possibly three or even more. The movement as a whole has matured during its ten years, but this has been a nonspecific maturation of generations of university students, and not always of leaders and active members. Some of this results from the chaotic organizations of SDS and its dislike and distrust of the sorts of party structures associated with the Old Left. Inevitably, too, a student movement loses some of its leaders because they graduate. Others have been more interested in the cultural left, and have moved to groups like the Yippies, or organized rock bands and made movies.

The current proposals of SDS are made in a frank effort to change the organization from the enormously creative but sloppy group that it was to a more tightly organized revolutionary force. And to do this, SDS seems willing to turn its back upon its own past, both achievements and failures. Its first priority must be to achieve a strong base in the Black community and develop an analysis of American capitalism. Yet a singular emphasis upon racism and imperialism will prevent it from finding any truly revolutionary force in the majority of the American community, or even

the working class. The troubling adoption of Old Left rhetoric, however opportunistic or temporary it is, will not restore unity, for it can never serve for the serious thought which must accompany any attempt to move off the campus. Moreover, making the creation of a Marxist-Leninist party the goal of the Movement invites some of the bewildering sectarian struggles of the Old Left. This is to take the business of revolution quite seriously, but in a special way.

The most particular danger of the moment is that SDS will substitute the lessons of the past year for the lessons of the last decade. In some ways, what happened at Chicago was healthy, even though the tactics used to exclude PL belong to the twisted history of those Old Left organizations whose splinters represented not much more than their spokesmen's name. Nonetheless, SDS is probably better off without Progressive Labor, an organization which condemned the North Vietnamese for negotiating, and worked against the Black movement for its attempts to secure such programs as open admissions to the universities.

But the expulsion of PL did not mean exorcism of all discouraging possibilities for the Movement. There still seems to be an urge to take on capitalism now, to seize what is construed as the revolutionary moment. More specifically, to continue to mistake growing repression for a moment of weakness reflects the provincialism of a movement which is still pretty much defined by the university, the one institution in America openly in a state of crisis.

For the contemporary crisis of elite institutions does not reflect a general polarization of society or a radicalization of any of the raw elements of social power. If SDS fights itself, whether for a unified program or over leadership, it will not be able to do the work it must. With pressure to create a revolution, there is also often the tendency to search for outside allies, to romanticize their radicalism, or to assume their allegiance. In such a state it is sometimes difficult to see one's own increasing isolation and irrelevance. Furthermore, there is the possibility that the cultural movement will die — or be embalmed in a rigid program of revolution culture as it was in the 1930s. All of these things would probably be inevitable if a clandestine party were established. The historical meaning of Marxist-Leninist parties in America is much more than their repressive internal structures, a set of incredible, irrelevant positions or the

defense of everything in the Soviet Union. The secret, centralized, bureaucratic party is simply the terminal disease of American radical movements.

What remains of the New Left is a fractured political generation. The name of SDS is claimed both by PL and the minority which expelled it. What is authentic about the organization is divided between a factionalized leadership and a membership which is largely uncommitted to any position, or is, at least for the moment, highly skeptical. The larger Movement extends in every direction, encompassing hundreds of activities, professional caucuses, underground magazines and papers, cultural movements and political tendencies. But whatever its weaknesses, SDS has been the organizing center of the Movement for almost a decade, and its crisis belongs to the whole New Left. It is far too easy to invoke the authority of the past or sloganize the subtleties of politics to solve its problems. The struggle for the survival of the New Left rests in its own traditions as well, in its spirit of experimentalism, its thirst for humane values and its desire to let people control their own lives. But it must finally acknowledge that the time has come to turn these values into a theory of social revolution that will expand the movement and confound its enemies who now wait hopefully for a season of sectarianism.

James Gilbert

AN ART OF VIOLENCE

By violence I intend here something quite specific and fairly narrow — pretty much, in fact, what most people mean by the term when they write to their Congressmen to complain about TV programs. I am not speaking of the whole class of art that T.S. Eliot points to when he speaks of Blake's "peculiarly terrifying" honesty, the "unpleasantness of great poetry," the "things which,

by some extraordinary labour of simplification, exhibit the essential sickness or strength of the human soul." Nor do I have in mind the formal violences, the grinding dislocations and compressions, that often characterize such works — Céline's, say, or Rimbaud's or Van Gogh's. And I am not even concerned with the full range of physical violences that one encounters in "cruel" works in Artaud's sense or senses of the term; Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror*, for instance, lies outside my province here. What I am concerned with are, broadly speaking, realistic violences, namely violences that may indeed occur in "cruel" works or in works characterized by a good deal of expressive intensifying and heightening, but that owe their effectiveness not to the general context of ideas and attitudes in which they occur or the formal daring of the work but to the simple fact that one believes that such violences could actually happen. Ezra Pound has called major literature "news that *stays* news." My chief aim, more precisely, will be to define some of the features of the kind of "realistic" violence that stays shocking however often one returns to it and — which is even more to the point — the effects of which seem to me unequivocally salutary. I shall naturally be drawing a number of my examples from movies, since these days the movies are what classical Latin literature once was to intellectuals — the one cultural topic they all have in common. I shall also be drawing a number from thrillers, of which I have read a great many. Where more "respectable" works are concerned, each reader will no doubt think of obvious examples that I have failed to give. However, I am not trying to give a panoramic view of fictional violences, I am trying to work out how and why it is that certain shocking things shock — things, for the most part, that have lodged themselves strongly in my memory during the past twenty-five years or so and have shocked *me*.

Since to be shocking is not in itself a merit, obviously, let me start with a couple of jokes that form useful paradigms and will help me to make certain basic distinctions. The first is of a familiar recent American kind: "Question: What is yellow and black and screams when it rolls over? Answer: A school bus." The second is English and dates back at least twenty years. Scene, an English bus; characters, the driver behind his glass partition, a man on the seat just behind him, another passenger looking on. Man behind

driver raps on partition, driver looks round, man waggles piece of string at him and grins, driver glowers apoplectically and hunches over wheel. Repetitions. Finally spectator asks obvious question. "Oh," says the string-wagger, "'e's got no sense of humour; 'is brother was 'anged this morning."

Now, the first joke, as I said, is of a familiar kind, and a number of other examples would have done just as well: e.g., the Helen Keller doll — you wind it up and it bumps into the furniture; or, "Mummy, mummy, why can't I go out and play?" "How many times do I have to tell you you've got leukemia?"; or, "But apart from that, Mrs. Lincoln, how did you enjoy the play?" Jokes of this sort (which on a first hearing are sometimes disturbingly funny) are essentially "idea" jokes — jokes rather akin, in certain ways, to some of the movies of Godard or to a novel like *Naked Lunch*. They are nasty, of course, but that is precisely their point. They are a form of counteraggression. They affront all the liberal-suburbanizing pressures making for uniform, unrelaxed postures of Sympathy, Pity, Good Works and so on — pressures, in other words, towards a bland, ego-suppressing and essentially not thought through niceness — and they often make a valid point of sorts. I mean, if they are "inhuman," the cliché-attitudes that they are going up against do, themselves, dehumanize people by reducing them all to types (the sick and maimed all martyrs, children all little loveable purities, the great suburban-liberal heroes all impossible paragons of nobility in a *Reader's Digest* way, etc.). However, they are only endurable because of the very mechanism that makes them funny, that the mind directed at first toward very real people or kinds of people, recognizes almost instantaneously that what is really under attack is certain other kinds of people *thinking* about them, and so veers away from a serious contemplation of the objects themselves. A derealizing of the physical occurs in other kinds of humor too, of course, especially the Tom-and-Jerry kind and the Ruthless Rhymes kind. But in the former the protagonists' interminable, ballet-like pursuit and counterpursuit, aggression and counteraggression (in which nothing is irrevocable and the body is indestructible), are in effect simply a kind of expressive heightening of the deadpan trading of insults between friends who know each other's deeper attitudes so well that they can afford to be abominably rude to each other.

(*The Importance of Being Earnest* comes to mind here too, as do certain kinds of clown acts and comedy teams.) And in the Ruthless Rhymes, such as "Eating more than he was able, / John fell dead at the breakfast table. / 'Mummy dear,' said sister Meg, / 'May I have Johnny's other egg?'" , the plots are impossible, the callousness presented as such, and the pleasures those of a tidied-up and harmless fantasy violence so outrageous that there is no possibility of confusing it with actuality. The derealizations involved here, in other words, are of the sort that enables one to withdraw temporarily, with a clear conscience, from the complexities of human behavior and from certain kinds of ethical claims.

In the second of the two bus jokes, in contrast, there is neither derealization nor escape, and in fact the more one goes on filling in the human realities of the three characters, the weightier the joke becomes. One has, I mean, the trapped rage of the driver who is dutifully Doing His Job and allowing the other man to remain inviolable behind his magic badge of Member of the Public, and the devastating unwitting self-exposure of the joke maker to a neutral observer; and with that self-exposure comes an agreeably tart subverting of the English overexaltation of the value of a sense of humor. Though the action may be a distasteful one, the representative attitudes and relationships of the three men are a good deal more lasting, I think, than the kind of shadowy cliché-liberal opponent implicit in the school bus joke, and I suspect that the latter and other jokes like it, along with a good deal of what passes for "cruel" art at present, will shrivel up and blow away as soon as its antagonists have gone. The second bus, however, can go chugging along for ever in the mind through Clapham or Birmingham or wherever it is, and it will continue to carry a very solid cargo of Englishness—and not just of Englishness—but of the three essential figures of the violated, the violator and the more or less decent spectator.

What I am getting at will be obvious by now, of course. I am suggesting that the most meaningful kind of deployment of violence consists not in a direct aggression against the reader or viewer with the aid of it (for the auditors of sick jokes are themselves, insofar as they are decent, partly their targets) in a way that involves thwarting or disparaging his more decent responses, but in a leading

of him into a closer awareness of and empathy with others. Conflicts may still come in the course of such an involvement, of course, but it will be because significant conflicts exist to begin with between the consciousnesses involved, and because getting involved with them may sometimes bring out certain ambivalences in one's own attitudes. And I suspect that the right kind of violence in art may in fact be paradigmatic of what one finds in a good deal of the right kind of *nonviolent* art. I mean, only to the extent that art presents credible sources of energy and resistance and credible relationships between them, and evokes directly or indirectly their inner realities, can it alert one to the possible realities of other people and the kinds of demands that can be put upon oneself. However, I shall not pursue that point in this paper; and what I shall turn to now is the obviously crucial question of how the necessary empathy and interaction comes about where violences are concerned.

To begin with, the reality of fictional violences is obviously greatly dependent on the reality of what is being violated; unless the victim is real the violence remains unmoving. In *Moby Dick* the kind of aggression embodied in the whaling profession in general, the *Pequod* and its mates more specifically and Ahab above all, is made truly real as violence by the almost unbearably poignant account of the underwater Grand Armada of whales quietly going about their domestic lives—innocently sentient beings who may all too easily be reduced to the state presented in the horribly painful description of the wounded whale in the same chapter. In Sade's *Juliette*, in contrast, virtually all the atrocities, so appalling when summarized, remain wholly cerebral and unmoving. We are told, for instance, of naked girls compelled to serve as living tables on which searingly hot dishes are placed, or being tortured to death as mealtime entertainments; but the girls, like so many of Sade's other victims, e.g., the helpless captives shut away from all hope of rescue in the castle of *Les Cent Vingt Jours de Sodome* or the numerous walled places of *Justine*, are simply not real for us. By "real" I mean the felt presence of consciousnesses, rendered or inferable, into which one can immediately project oneself; into which, in fact, one is *compelled* to project oneself. And a relative numbness of response is, I suspect, not only more serious but also more obvious in violent

than in nonviolent fiction. In ordinary novels and short stories it is usually perfectly satisfactory to give to the bulk of the characters only the surface reality that is necessary for their impingement on the protagonists. Normally no intense immediate sympathy with them is needed, and sympathy can often be withheld entirely when they are presented as more or less "villainous" in their relationship to hero or heroine. Where violences are involved, however, each victim of it becomes in a sense a hero himself momentarily, in that behind the surface a good deal of intense feeling must be presumed to be going on, of a sort that underlines not his differences from the reader but his kinship. And accordingly a novelist — or for that matter any kind of artist — offering to deal in violences has to work unusually hard at achieving an immediacy of response. We can accept on trust the reality of, say, Jane Austen's Mr. Collins without in the least knowing or caring how it would feel to be Mr. Collins at this or that moment. But we have all known acute pain at one time or another, and we know immediately when we are failing to get the "pain" experience in a fictional situation where someone is suffering more or less acutely. What, then, produces the empathy?

Familiarity with the kinds of victims can help, obviously. In Flaubert's *Salammbô*, for instance, the three most shocking passages are the accounts of the valley of crucified lions, of the three horribly mutilated pet elephants and of the slow tearing to death of the Libyan Matho as he walks between the rows of enraged citizens in Carthage; and the first two seem to me decidedly the more immediate in their impact, just as a single sentence in the Bricksville section of *Huckleberry Finn* is in some ways more coldly horrible than the whole brilliant account there of the killing of Boggs: "There couldn't anything wake them up all over and make them happy all over like a dog-fight — unless it might be putting turpentine on a stray dog and setting fire to him, or tying a tin pan to his tail and see him run himself to death." It helps, that is to say, when there are the fewest accretions of distance, foreignness and sheer "otherness" that need transposing into terms of one's own experience. So too with the general context of the violences, the way in which the "world" of this or that piece of fiction connects up with one's own. In Georges Franju's deeply troubling *Les Yeux sans Visage*, for example, part of the peculiar horror comes from the sheer ordinariness of things: it is an ordinary Paris queue past which the ageing Alida

Valli drives in her very ordinary Citroën DC, the girl she picks up is an ordinary student concerned about getting home on time and rationally uneasy about the company she may be getting into as the car takes her further and further away from the expected route — and it is this averagely pretty girl whose face is left irrevocably monstrous after the operation on her. This example also brings to mind the importance of *work* — work by characters, I mean — in establishing a normal or normal-feeling context. In most horror movies, as in most of Sade, there is either an almost literally closed-off situation — a castle, an old dark house, an island, from which there is no escape and in which the victims, having been brought there by chance or force, can engage in almost none of the kinds of everyday activities that could give us a sense of their existing as normal social beings with social roles to play; or else the setting is Transylvania or the fogs of Victorian London, with again a very restricted range of workaday stimuli and responses permitted to the characters. But Franju's Dr. Genessier holds down a perfectly respectable job in modern Paris, as does the murdering hero of Michael Powell's brilliant *Peeping Tom* in a masterfully evoked modern London; and I suspect that the general superiority of the Frankenstein movies to the Dracula ones, or at least their lesser vulnerability to irony and parody, may be due in part to the fact that Baron Frankenstein likewise has a social-professional role of a sort that is impossible to Count Dracula. (The fact that it is essentially working men and women that we see in Tod Browning's *Freaks* can also be mentioned here.) Again, one can speak loosely of "closed" and "open" situations even when the setting is normal and there is a good deal of the texture of ordinary life in the behavior of individual characters. In Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest* (his masterpiece, and essentially a comic novel I believe) the violences are confined almost wholly to the sharply individuated criminal fraternity of an unnamed small American city, and by the end they have largely wiped each other out. In John McPartland's much more disquieting *Face of Evil*, on the other hand, one has the sense of glimpsing the edges of a large and all too credible modern power system in which organized crime, corrupt politics and corrupt business interlock and from whose operations the reader himself might not be safe. The latter work I would call "open," the former "closed."

However, while the things that I have mentioned so far may

help, it is obvious both that they can all obtain in works that are nevertheless very bad, and that works in which none of them obtain can nevertheless be very good, Schoedsack and Pichel's *The Most Dangerous Game* being a prime example. At the risk, therefore, of sounding as if I were offering a recipe, I would like to suggest two or three ingredients that seem to me not marginal but essential if the necessary empathy is to occur and if the violence involved is to be truly shocking.

I suggest, first of all, that an essential element is an acute sense of the body; and this is not, I think, quite the truism it may sound. After all, it is common enough in thrillers to find violences endured with only trivial consequences — sappings without headaches afterwards, knees in the groin that don't prevent sex the same night and so on. (At times, of course, as in the Shell Scott thrillers of Richard S. Prather, things go so far that one is really in Woody Woodpecker country.) Similarly, in only one thriller that I have come across in literally hundreds of "tough" thrillers is the information given that sudden chloroforming is liable to cause a sudden relaxation of the sphincter muscles, and in only three or four (all by John D. MacDonald, as it happens) is it acknowledged that sudden death and acute fear can have the same consequences. Again, there are very few thrillers indeed in which the long-term physiological-psychological consequences of having been tortured or methodically beaten-up are disturbingly acknowledged: MacDonald's *The Executioners* (also titled *Cape Fear*) and *Death Trap* are a couple, Donald Hamilton's *Date with Darkness* and *The Steel Mirror* a couple more, McPartland's *Face of Evil* a fifth, Geoffrey Household's *Rogue Male* a sixth and no doubt there are a few more that can be added, but it still isn't an impressive score. Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that in the overwhelming majority of thrillers, the body as a complex tissue of sensitivities and fatigues, an organism with its own imperative rules and reactions, is scarcely there at all, just as it isn't there in most erotica. And if this seems a strong claim, the reader should reconsider whatever thrillers he is familiar with in the light of the almost uniquely kinesthetic *Rogue Male* and Kenneth Millar's *Blue City*, in the former of which it is even acknowledged that a hero's body can excrete. The *really* deplorable thing about most of the

violences adduced so indignantly in tracts like Gershon Legman's *Love and Death* and Fredric Wertham's *A Sign for Cain* is that physically they aren't violent enough; the fist fights in most Westerns, for example, especially when judged in comparison with the one in Huston's *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, are preposterous not only in the immunity of the combatants to blows but in their immunity from fatigue. And the basic criticism to be made of the Bond books, quite apart from the almost criminal feebleness of their plotting, is that the only strenuously muscular activities described in them that are obviously felt from the inside are those, such as skin diving and judo, that are available to the ordinary deskman on vacation or working out in the gym. Bond himself as an allegedly highly trained and ruthlessly functioning fighting body is simply a hole in the air when compared with, say, Hamilton's Matt Helm or Peter O'Donnell's Willy Garvin. No doubt it is precisely this fact, and the even greater feebleness displayed in the movies, that helps to account for the Bond boom, since it is reassuring for *l'homme moyen physique* to see a hero who may be handsomer but isn't disturbingly more physically competent than himself. But the obvious fakings and fumbings on Fleming's part are exasperating in themselves, and since the villains similarly lack muscularity (consider for example the ludicrous beating-up in *Diamonds are Forever*) the nastier violences wear all the more the look of authorial contrivance and calculation rather than of being natural by-products of the activities of convincingly violent men.

The best thrillers, in contrast, especially those of Household, Hamilton, MacDonald, McPartland, O'Donnell, Millar and Charles Williams, are informed by a very intimate awareness of what it feels like to *do* violent things with intense bodily concentration and speed, which I suspect is something that can't be faked if one hasn't had some experience of it. And so, of course, are certain crime movies, very notably *Kiss Me Deadly* and *On the Waterfront* and certain Westerns. A good deal of *High Noon*, for instance, may have been kitsch, but the final showdown wasn't, and one felt poignantly and memorably what it was like to be an ageing man running and dodging through the dust and heat, straining simultaneously to outthink and outperform the murderous quartet who were after him, the body's impulses often virtually preceding those of the mind. Yet

the truth, it must be admitted, is that there are very few violent entertainments (to borrow Graham Greene's term) that are violent in *truly* shocking ways — shocking, I mean, in the sort of way that Peter Watkins' *Culloden* or Franju's *Le Sang des Bêtes* or the suicide near the end of Céline's *Mort à Crédit* or the blinding of Gloucester in *Lear* are shocking. One almost never has to avert one's eyes from the screen or struggle not to lay the book down; rather, one waits with fascination for what is coming next, and one is entertained. The whole genre is one in which there is a particularly strong pull away from the physical in some respects and a blanking out of the really unpleasant; and for all the violences, it tends to promote a sense of security and invulnerability in the reader. And this is so whether the hero is Spillane's Mike Hammer or MacDonald's Travis McGee. I wish to suggest that a very important way in which certain violences *do* shock, and a very important reason why they are salutary, is that they work to undermine precisely that yearning for invulnerability that violent "entertainments" cater to.

At its crudest, of course, such a yearning is gratified by simply refraining from looking at certain possibilities. The moviegoer or TV watcher can give himself up to dreams of violent glory in a way that eminently invites the tart comment in one of MacDonald's books that "the gutsy dramas of the mass media tend to make us forget that the average male is so unaccustomed to sudden pain that if you mash his nose flat he'll be nauseated for hours, spend two days in bed, and be shaky for the rest of the week." The author of *Histoire d'O* can genteelly ignore the question of what it would be like being ravished while one had a bad headache or a cold or cystitis. A French admirer of Sade can announce blandly that "il est indispensable d'ajouter que le vrai sadique considère le contrainte, non comme un instrument d'injustice ou d'oppression, mais comme un épreuve de caractères. . . . Il lui est impossible, par exemple, sauf par une erreur fatale, de soumettre des esprits libres comme le sien; il en deviendrait à son tour la victime." And one could go on multiplying examples indicative of a craving for changes in the rules of violence that would help to make engaging in violences oneself, at least in imagination, a pleasurable matter (Sade himself, of course, being the supreme exemplar of such a craving). However, it is a rather more complex kind of protection from consequences that I have in mind, especially where movies are concerned.

Works involving violences, like other kinds, tend to accumulate their conventions and to fall into certain patterns; and if one is out for relaxation, one can hardly have too many conventional elements especially in horror movies and Westerns — the heroine's panic-stricken flight through a midnight forest as Something makes ominous noises in the underbrush alongside the path; the rifle barrel easing out of an upper story hotel window as the hero rides up the main street; and so on. But of course the relaxation — the fundamental relaxation, as distinct from a pleasurable tension and tingling of part of one's mind — is possible only because of certain implicit limits. The Something doesn't catch up with the heroine, the rifle speaks but the hero doesn't fall dead; and in both cases the experienced viewer is not surprised. Of course there are ostensible variations, and it may sometimes not be easy to explain to a less experienced viewer why it is "right" for one particular hero in a *two*-hero Western to be killed in the last reel, or for one particular starlet to be chewed up by the werewolf, but not for another. But in general the limits are fairly clearly marked: there are individuals to whom violences of certain kinds are simply not going to happen, and others to whom they may and who in a sense are expendable. The reasons for the essential invulnerability of the normal hero (he may of course, particularly in Westerns of the last decade or so, be viciously beaten or maimed, but he recovers in time for the final showdown) are obvious enough. It is enjoyable to identify with someone who is invincible, especially when the skills displayed by him are indeed convincing (as with Hammett's Continental Op, and Modesty Blaise and Willy Garvin, and several of the characters played by Toshiro Mifune) and sometimes even when they are preposterous (as with the heroes of Leoni's "Dollar" Westerns and Corbucci's *Django*). This sort of thing becomes annoying only insofar as there is the sort of faking and fumbling that I commented on apropos of Bond, and vicious only insofar as a crusading element enters into the violences, by which I mean that good and bad are sharply dichotomized and one is invited to identify comfortably with the hero as he self-righteously punishes dehumanized villains who *deserve* to suffer and for whom one need feel no twinge of sympathy. The self-righteousness can come through an ostensibly respectable ethic, or occasionally, as in Sade, through the inversion of one; but in any case there seems to me to be essentially very little difference between the violences of such figures as the

Lone Ranger (the TV cartoon one, I mean), Mike Hammer, Sade's Juliette and the odious Talus of Book V of *The Faerie Queene*. However, it is primarily the question of the victims that interests me more here.

Some victims are, of course, in a sense eminently "natural" ones. When I spoke earlier of "closed" situations, I was speaking substantially of situations in which violences are in some way natural and appropriate. The most obvious kind of appropriateness, in terms of plot, is when the people involved are all of the same kind, all more or less professionally violent men who know the risks they are running — professional criminals, soldiers, gladiators, gunfighters (or violent-minded cowboys), spies and the like. A prizefight, I suppose, is one of the most obvious real-life paradigms of this, and it is significant that almost no deeply moving films have been made about the fight business. (Robert Wise's *The Set-Up* has stayed in my mind, but it is years since I saw it, and perhaps it doesn't wear well; as for Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers*, the truly moving parts, as I recall, were all in a sense extraneous to the actual fight business.) But of course even nonviolent victims in a lot of movies take risks that in a sense *invite* violences — the oversanguine homesteaders in Indian territory, for example, or the kind of pea-brained starlet who inevitably goes prospecting with a candle into the cellars of the castle where she is spending the night, quite as if she herself had never seen a horror movie in her life. And naturally the violences arrive on cue, in a sort of symbiotic relationship between victims and violators in which sometimes (for not *everything* that Sade said was nonsense) one is emotionally on the side of the violator, whatever one's consciously judging mind may tell one. Christopher Isherwood in *Lions and Shadows* spoke of the kind of woman who makes one "long to give her a terrific, sadistic kick on the behind." Similarly, I think, a sense of exasperation can be induced by the kind of "nice" girl (Mia Farrow in *Rosemary's Baby* is a prime example, and so is Audrey Hepburn in the nauseating *Wait until Dark*, but of course there are innumerable others in the modern so-called "Gothic" novels and in the kind of thriller that at least one publishing house classifies on the dust jacket as "Damsel in Distress") who is plainly acting, in an inversion of the obnoxious invincibility of some heroes, with a lack of gumption so markedly *below* what one hopes one might be

capable of oneself that one instinctively resists being drawn into sympathy and approval because of the temporary lessening of one's own vitality that would be entailed therein. And even where no ambivalence exists, and the victims are patently in no way to blame for their fates, a subtle closing-off and containment of the violence can still occur. It is distressing, for instance, to read through Guy Chapman's thick anthology (*Vain Glory*) of selections from firsthand accounts of the Great War and come upon almost nothing that brings home to one really vividly the awfulness of being a conscript in such a war; and a similar kind of benumbment can be induced by poor firsthand accounts of concentration camp life. The violences in such accounts happen to other people; the assent one gives to the fact that they *could* happen to oneself is merely notional.

But, of course, while there are a number of "natural" victims in movies and novels, there are, as I have said, a number of peaceable people to whom violences don't, and in terms of the conventions of "entertainments," *shouldn't* happen. I don't mean simply that "good" people like kind old priests and loving mothers are sacrosanct. Nor do I simply mean that likeable people who have done good things in the course of a movie should not be gratuitously repaid with evil at the end, even though that may sometimes be the case. (No one who saw *The Plainsman* as a child in the thirties, I imagine, has ever really got over the shock of Gary Cooper's being murdered at the end of it.) What I mean is that, in terms of conventional responses, the reader or viewer mustn't be made to feel acutely that what happens to this or that person is *unfair*. And I suspect rather strongly that the feeling of unfairness generally comes when one has been drawn into the consciousness of someone who is trying fairly actively to accomplish something that one wants him to succeed in accomplishing. The something may be quite small and undramatic, such as eating a good dinner or, as in Maupassant's "Deux Amis," going out for a quiet day's fishing. It may be very dramatic, as in the first murder in *Psycho*, where Hitchcock so masterfully cashes in on the empathy that the audience has been building up with the process of trying to cope with one's conscience after robbing one's boss. It may involve more fundamental and as it were "total" drives, as in the hero's desperate bid for freedom in Franju's *La Tête contre les Murs*. But I think that in almost all cases the reader or viewer feels

that the victim is engaged in something eminently "natural," and that he in some sense *ought* to be allowed to finish it. Most works of violence in fact cater to that feeling, and in so doing cater to our own sense that when we are doing something reasonably natural and reasonably respectable (in our own eyes at least) we too, if the game has any just rules at all, deserve to be allowed to bring it to a successful conclusion.

And it is characteristic — and one of the greatest strengths — of the rare works or episodes in which violence is truly shocking that they close the gap between us and violences, so that there is no longer on the one hand a normal and natural world that we ourselves inhabit and in which we are safe, and on the other a variety of worlds or activities in which violences happen merely to other people. One can get pretty fed up at times with French movie criticism, but it is the best we have, and one of the most valuable terms that recur in it is *l'insolite*, the unusual. Again and again in successful presentations of violence one's eye is caught by the unusual, the odd, the incongruous detail or constellation of details that closes the gap. The most brilliant account of battle that I know is *The Red Badge of Courage*, for example, and it is brilliant precisely because the disruption of stereotypes is one of its central preoccupations and because the details of battle that don't accord with its youthful hero's preconceptions have precisely the vividness that one misses in Chapman's anthology and that is only occasionally present even in Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu*. "Another [man] grunted suddenly as if he had been struck by a club in the stomach. He sat down and gazed ruefully. In his eyes there was mute, indefinite reproach. Farther up the line a man, standing behind a tree, had had his knee joint splintered by a ball. Immediately he had dropped his rifle and gripped the tree with both arms. And there he remained, clinging desperately and crying for assistance . . ." — that is the sort of thing in Crane's masterpiece that I mean. And this same kind of oddness distinguishes such episodes elsewhere as the rightly famous account of Fabrice's first coming under fire in *La Chartreuse de Parme*, or the linking passages in Hemingway's *In Our Time*, or the final hand-to-hand combat of Modred and Arthur in Malory, or, to switch to a different kind of violence, the dreadful torture scene in Millar's *Blue City*, especially the following all too kinesthetic passage:

I was at the window before the scream ended, careless about whether I'd be seen or not. . . .

Joe Sault was in a kitchen chair half-facing me, with Kerch in front of him and Rusty behind him holding his arms. His left ear hung down like a red rag, dripping blood rhythmically onto his stylish collar. His mouth was ragged and spongy. His body was naked from the waist down, and his shirt had been rolled up under his armpits. His lean belly, bisected by a line of dark hair, trembled steadily like a beaten dog's.

Floraine was sitting with her fur-coated back to me, almost against the window. She didn't move and she didn't say a word. Garland was standing behind her, but all I could see of him was the grey elbow of his coat. The vibrating white light of a gasoline lamp on the table gave the room an ugliness as precise as a raw photograph.

Karch put down the heavy iron spoon that he had been balancing in his hand, and picked up a paring knife from the table. Before he began to move, I sensed that he was going to turn, and ducked.

All the participants except the narrator are criminals, and the young man being tortured is himself a thoroughly unpleasant one, so that we have here the exact reverse of the kind of automatic ethical dehumanizing of people on the "wrong" side that I spoke of earlier. (Such instances of reversal are, I think, rather uncommon. One of the most memorable, I suppose, is that in which the blinded Cyclops tenderly addresses his favorite ram, under which Odysseus is hanging.) What is especially to my purpose, however, is the means by which the humanizing comes about. At the risk of seeming to offer another recipe, I would like to suggest that very often in the kinds of violences I am discussing one is made aware of the continuation of normal, nonviolent life at the very moment when the violences are occurring. Kitchen utensils, domestic animals, trees, the corncob in *Sanctuary* (especially in the dreadful statement, "Only we never used a cob. We made him wish we had used a cob"), the "vile jelly" on which Cornwall sets his foot, the "organic" comparisons in the death scenes in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the laboratory animals and doves at the end of *Les Yeux sans Visage* — what results is an at times almost unendurable sense both of the complete believability of the violence and of its immense *strangeness*. In this connection, incidentally, the fight in the woods in Tony Richardson's *Tom Jones* also comes to mind, in which suddenly, after innumerable costume

movies, a sword ceases to be a picturesque ornament and becomes simply a murderously pointed piece of steel giving an overwhelming advantage to the man holding it. (Here, too, in contrast to all the gallant conventional sword *fights* in other movies, there is simply the will to murder.) The same kind of point can be made about Jack Palance's gunning-down of Elisha Cook, Jr., in *Shane*, with its sudden bringing into focus of the dreadful potentials of that picturesquely noisy piece of metal known as a "revolver."

And in a number of incidents, furthermore, one also has the penetration of a slightly different kind of barrier or shield, namely the kind behind which one tries to hide (or empathetically to hide others) when one invokes the idea of *status*, whether social, psychological or moral. For example, I have heard more than one person comment, rightly it seemed to me, that the most shocking moment in Polanski's *Repulsion* was when Catherine Deneuve's clippers suddenly bit deliberately into the finger of her client. The deliberateness was part of the shock, of course, as was the extreme normality of everything else in the context. But the most important reason, it seems to me, was the complete relaxation and trust in the presence of edged tools that had suddenly been violated, the sudden disruption of an entire social convention in which, by virtue of the mere fact of being a "client," one was safe. (Hence too, no doubt, the peculiar fascination evoked for so many years in England by the idea of the throat-slitting Demon Barber, Sweeney Todd, and the nastiness of the barbershop "execution" in Windust's *The Enforcer* and the flesh-creeping comic effectiveness of W. C. Fields's *The Barber Shop*.) Often, of course, the kind of shock that comes when the normally sacrosanct is violated is unequivocal, and calls for no special comment at this point. It is simply and purely unfair and awful, for example, when in *Huckleberry Finn* the middle-aged Boggs is coldly gunned down at the very moment when everything is working conventionally in his favor — his age, his harmlessness, his painful sobering up, his terror, the presence of his daughter hurrying forward to take him home. And of course the Odessa Steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin* is an absolute anthology of violences to the normally sacrosanct, culminating in the revelation that even to be a middle-aged and respectably dressed gentlewoman was no protection against the troops. But at times, I think, there is something equivocal about such vio-

lences, insofar as the kinds of presumptions of safety that are involved are themselves open to question. To give a not entirely frivolous example, it was positively refreshing when in Del Tenney's *The Horror of Party Beach* great black scaly Things came up out of the water and carried off screaming teenagers in a context — rock and roll beach dancing, pajama parties, and so on — that normally serves in such movies to reassure teenagers of their own admirableness and invulnerability by virtue of the mere fact of being between the ages of twelve and twenty. Or, more weightily, there is the episode in *Wuthering Heights* in which, having lured young Cathy and Nelly Dean up to the Heights, Heathcliff casually grips the wrists of the former in one hand and with the other “administered three or four tremendous slaps to her face.” The action shocks especially because of the implicit revelation that Cathy can from now on expect absolutely no mercy at the Heights by virtue of her various conventionally estimable status — daughter of respectable local citizen, pretty young girl, pitying lover of a wretchedly unhappy boy, “heroine” of this part of the novel. It is shocking; indeed, it outweighs some of the ostensibly greater violences in the book. Nevertheless one can still feel, I think, that Cathy, like those other adolescents, may have been presuming a little too much on the world's treating her benevolently because of her status, and there is no doubt that she has to some extent mentally dehumanized (or at least overconfidently categorized) Heathcliff, just as the injured middle-aged woman in the beauty parlor may have overconfidently categorized and dismissed from her thoughts the technician ministering to her elegance. Certainly E. M. Forster, that most civilized of men, understood all this sort of thing very well indeed: it is the chief point of the utterly “indefensible” torturing of Philip by Gino in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. And this brings me back to the figure of the violator.

What shocks profoundly in a number of the examples that I have given is not just that someone is assaulted or tortured or killed but that someone else is undisturbedly willing to do these things and to ignore the conventional safeguards of innocence or ignorance or helplessness, just like the crucifiers of the lions and mutilators of the elephants in *Salamambo*, or the torturers of the dogs in *Huckle-*

berry Finn. And, to revert for a moment to my bus paradigm, the necessary spectator is present in that the viewer is compelled to bring his full normal ethical consciousness to bear on the situation before him, rather than becoming temporarily a simpler and cruder person than he normally is — a Superman, a Lone Ranger and so on. Nevertheless, an essential element seems to be to be a sizeable measure of empathy with the violator involved. Let me give another example from Flaubert to bring out the point a little more sharply. In the relatively undisturbing account of Julien's massacring of the beasts in *Le Légende de Saint Julien l'Hospitalier*, one ostensibly tiny incident seem to me rather deeply disturbing, namely the one in which Julien, coming upon a sleeping grouse, cuts off its feet ("Bientôt, il entra dans un bois. Au bout d'une branche, un coq de bruyère engourdi par le froid dormait la tête sous l'aile. Julien, d'un revers d'épée, lui faucha les deux pattes, et sans le ramasser continua sa route"). One feels empathetically the benumbed defenselessness of the creature huddled up against the cold, the shock of its awakening, the hopelessness of its frantic struggles in the snow; one also feels the casual deliberateness of the backhand stroke; and finally one feels the impossibility of getting through to the swordsman should a similar whim have taken him about a *human* creature — oneself. Yet however much one deplores the act, one understands the doer of it and can neither hate nor despise him. And this seems to me as it should be.

Now, to speak in some sense favorably of certain kinds of violators has considerable pitfalls, of course. Especially acute, I think, is the risk of intellectualizing matters so that the violent man, especially the violent outsider or rebel, becomes automatically the Hero and his victims (as in *Bonnie and Clyde*) merely squares and creeps. Emily Brontë beautifully caught the kind of sentimentality and dishonesty entailed in this sort of thing ("But no brutality disgusted her — I suppose, she had an innate admiration of it, if only her precious person were secure from injury!"; thus, percipiently, Heathcliff on Isabella). And the French cult of Sade, as I have indicated, seems to me an especially clear modern example of such sentimentality, issuing as it does in pronouncements such as the one I quoted earlier or in the following:

Nous sommes . . . à l'opposé du bourreau insensible, ou du dégénéré criminel: notre héros est généralement d'une culture approfondi, d'une courtoisie insolite, il manifeste le plus souvent une humeur de belle qualité, conçoit le crime comme une oeuvre d'art et d'amour . . . , et accepte loyalement les règles de son propre jeu, jusqu'à en devenir la victime.

One can *understand* the cult, of course, just as one can understand the appeal of Hitler's claim that "I free mankind from the yoke of reason which weighs upon it, from the obscene and humiliating intoxications derived from chimeras, from so-called conscience and morality, and from the exigencies of personal liberty and independence of which only a few can serve." One can understand the appeal of being a totally different kind of person from what one is, free of inhibiting introspection, self-distrust, confused yearnings and timidities ("awkward, pasty, feeling the draught, / [With] health and strength and beauty on the brain," in W. H. Auden's words). When one comes, for instance, on Nietzsche's remarks in the *Genealogy of Morals* about the casual unreflecting brutality of earlier types of people, they seem surprisingly convincing, and one may well agree that our more humane times don't necessarily represent a total advance and improvement. But Sade himself, of course, was quite unable to recreate such "simpler" types, remaining hopelessly stuck with intellectuals, and very inept ones at that (inept *qua* "thinkers," I mean), all endlessly self-regarding and self-justifying, all interminably poking and messing around inside their own sensations and "ideas"; and in point of fact, though admittedly my reading is limited, I do not recall coming across his admirers adducing any *actual* monstrous figures as "good" Sadean figures, except perhaps Gilles de Retz—another intellectual. (For that matter, the author of *Le Sadisme au Cinéma* seems scarcely able to come up with even a *fictional* figure that he strongly admires.) And in any case the sort of sentimentality I am pointing to is dangerous.

True, it might be argued that in it we may not have much more than a yearning for a "pastoral" change in the rules of bodily behavior (the sort of yearning that is very noticeable in *Histoire d'O* in places) and that the carry-over from fantasy to action, as with other kinds of pastoral fantasizing, may be negligible. Sade himself, after all, behaved more or less decently during the Revolution, and the French group that has done the most to promote him seems

to be also the one in which one finds some of the strongest protests against actual atrocities, at least when they are more or less right-wing ones. However, there was no logical reason whatever for Sade's own decency, and neither is there any for that of his admirers. Which is to say that there is no strong reason, inside such a system, for opposing the violences of others that seem to issue from a strong core of emotion and personal conviction. Just as the American brand of sentimentality towards fictional gangsters makes it in fact harder for a crimp to be put on the activities of actual ones, so the more sophisticated European forms of sentimentality toward violence in general, it seems to me, can result not only in an equivocalness towards atrocities on the left, but also, ultimately, in an instability of attitude even toward those on the right. It is all very well to protest that one disapproves of insensitive executioners and torturers and likes gentlemanly ones. But only a year or two after the appearance of *Histoire d'O*, Massu's torturing *légionnaires* began their work in earnest in Algeria, and it seems very likely that some of them fitted the Sadean pattern a good deal more closely than Mille. Reage's preposterous bare-genitaled clubmen, and sooner or later the implications of that sort of fact begins to tinge at least a portion of what can be called loosely the general intellectual mind.

However, all this is precisely a reason why the fictional presentation of really credible figures with an intense and ruthless urge to torment and destroy is so desirable. One can inspect them, one can ponder them — and one can't sentimentalize them. I have in mind such figures as the gunmen in *High Noon*, the hoodlums played by Lee Marvin in *The Big Heat* and *Bad Day at Black Rock*, Robert Ryan's anti-Semite in *Crossfire*, a number of figures in the novels of MacDonald and McPartland, Anthony Quayle's memorable treasure hunter in John Guillermin's *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure*, Glenn Ford's hanging judge in a Western (circa 1954) whose name escapes me, and several of the bandits in *O Cangaceiro*. In view of the large opportunities for confusedly ambivalent responses where fictional violences are concerned, it seems to me extremely desirable that certain artists should be able to go the limit in ways that show up the shams and our responses to them for what they are. And, to return to my point a couple of pages back, a very important element in such presentations seems to me to be that one understands and to some extent

empathizes with the violators. Let me develop that idea with the help of an "extreme" case.

As Resnais' *Nuit et Brouillard* so powerfully reminded us, one of the most disturbing aspects of the Nazi horrors is that their appallingness diminishes with time; and the more that artistically mediocre accounts of them multiply, the more this happens. I would like to suggest that an important reason for this diminishment may be the paucity of distinguished works that present Nazis and the Nazi *Weltanschauung* empathetically and thereby bring things out of the realm of nightmarish quasi-natural disasters and into a daylight where one's full intelligence can function — function as it does with, say, figures like Edmund and Cornwall in *Lear*. More than a simple recoil from certain kinds of confrontation is involved, too. Such a recoil is eminently understandable, and one can well understand why Godard, trying presumably to get beyond it, once wanted, according to Richard Roud, "to make a film about the concentration camps, but one which would be seen from the side of the torturers, as it were. It would be concerned with their practical, everyday problems: how to incinerate twenty bodies for the price of ten — cutting down on gas, etc. We would see typists carefully making their inventories of hair, teeth, etc. What would have been unbearable about such scenes, said Godard, was not the horror of them, but on the contrary, their completely normal and everyday aspect." Yet I think that in the mind's recoil, something else may be lurking, something more disquieting still. There is surely something equivocal, something *unresolved* in the feelings aroused by Nazism — an unacknowledged and unfronted measure of sympathy with energy, power, freedom from certain inhibitions, and (for a substantial period, which is what matters when one is talking about consciousnesses) success and the unperturbed enjoyment of total power. "Sarban's" fantasy novel *The Sound of His Horn*, set in a Europe that has had a hundred years of the New Order, catches an aspect of this. So, of course, does Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo's brilliant *It Happened Here*, with its bringing home to one of some of the very tangible everyday benefits of being in the Party. And I rather wonder how many of the viewers of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* have not felt their pulses stirring disconcertingly during the final exhilarated singing of the Horst Wessel song and caught that tune lingering in their

heads for days afterwards. Certain of Brownlow's comments on the making of his own film seem very much to the point here: "The Nazi era was as forbidden a subject at that time [the mid-fifties] as pornography to the Victorians. Neither of us had yet developed an understanding of National Socialism; we shared the general horror at their crimes, but were fascinated by the unexplained elements of the Nazi phenomena. I have never been able to analyze this. Both of us are inordinately squeamish. We cringe at the sight of a hospital uniform. Nazism should have repelled us with its constant reminders of brutality. But mysteries continued to cloud the era. And mystery is a powerful attraction."

Now, my speaking of empathy in such a context will inevitably have brought flooding into the reader's mind not only the bureaucrats but also the appalling psychopaths and perverts who "found" themselves through Nazism — Julius Streicher, for instance, or the concentration camp guard described in Eugen Kogon's *Theory and Practice of Hell* who at night "would sometimes summon a victim from one of the cells and leisurely do away with him in [his] room. He would then place the body underneath his bed and fall asleep peacefully, his work well done." It is, however, not empathy with figures like *these* that I suggest. On the contrary, such examples remind one especially powerfully of how certain kinds of violences, like certain kinds of suffering, are in fact wearying and unenlightening in their claims on us for strong responses. Passive suffering, as Yeats remarked, isn't a subject for tragedy, and clumsy expositions of it tend to become wearisome and can lead eventually, even, to the sick-joke kind of reaction. One is drawn initially into a sort of shocked empathy, but the states of consciousness involved (as re-created by oneself from the given pointers in an effort to understand how one would feel and act oneself under such conditions) are almost inevitably less well articulated and less clear than one's own consciousness normally is; and so, denied any clarification and advance in understanding, one ends by withdrawing from involvement. Well, much the same seems true of certain kinds of aggression, or, perhaps more accurately, of certain states of consciousness out of which aggressions issue — states of confusion, disarray, an overall lowering of psychological coherence and effectiveness. Let me return briefly to horror movies for illustration.

There would seem to be, essentially, two sharply different kinds of movie "monsters." On the one hand, one is confronted with beings who have either crossed the border between the "human" and the "monstrous" and become dehumanized, or who are right on the border and are struggling not to cross it altogether, and who in either case are patently the victims of forces outside their own control. The most obvious examples, of course, are werewolves, vampires, zombies, Jekyll-Hyde, Frankenstein's monsters, and occasional figures like the spore-infested returned astronaut of *The Quatermass Experiment*; and in their various ways such more or less supernatural figures obviously embody symbolically certain anxieties that most of us have felt about our own stability, which presumably helps to account for the long cinematic lives of a number of them. The correspondences, however, are inevitably very crude, and the figures have mostly proven very vulnerable to parody, as writers like Carlos Clarens have reminded us. And when a cinematic use is made of more "natural" monsters of the deranged sort, as in *Psycho*, Robert Aldrich's *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* and a number of similar works, the result is either Grand-Guignol or, as in *Repulsion* especially, the kind of clinical rendering of madness that, whatever anxieties one may have had about one's own mind, helps to bring home to one the fact that the peculiar awfulness of certain kinds of madness is precisely that the afflicted persons *have* crossed a frontier beyond which, unless one happens to be an uncommonly gifted psychiatrist like R. D. Laing, one cannot follow them. (It is significant, I suspect, that the best of the Frankenstein series, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, is also the one in which the monster has been the most humanized.) There is, however, another kind of absolutely central figure in a number of horror movies, and I think that it is the most important kind, namely the totally committed and self-controlled figure gripped by a more or less intellectual obsession in the pursuit of which he will shrink from absolutely no violences or atrocities that seem necessary. Dr. Genessier of *Les Yeux sans Visage*, Baron Frankenstein, Dr. Moreau, Count Zaroff of *The Most Dangerous Game*, the plastic surgeon of Sidney Hayer's *Circus of Horrors*, the black magician of Jacques Tourneur's *Night of the Demon*, and (by virtue of his intelligence and the lucidity of almost all his behavior on screen) the hero of *Peeping Tom* — these and others like them, it seems to me,

are the truly disquieting figures, and it is noteworthy that most of the films that I have listed are high points in the genre of horror movies as a whole. The conduct of such figures is iniquitous, of course. But the atrocities that they perpetrate or are responsible for issue from coherent, unified personalities functioning with complete certainty and, in a sense, *non-monstrously*. That is to say, the figures are not crippled, deformed, contemptible or pitiable like the figures in the first group, and up to a point they are obviously capable of functioning perfectly successfully in normal society.

What I have been leading up to is that the more ordered and channeled the energies making for violences are, the more significant the violences themselves are likely to be, and the more illuminating the entailed empathy. I am not talking necessarily of an "intellectual" channeling. At the same time, though, the more the violent man functions publicly in terms of some reasonably coherent public system of ideas, the better; and the better it is, too, if one sees him as prepared to meet the full challenge of other no less purposive aggressors in a more or less admirable way. Sade's garrulous males, all hidden away inside the black-fairy-tale security of walls and money from the threats of other males (and even from such social conventions and difficulties as confronted Valmont in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*) are merely contemptible. They are repulsive and dangerous, insofar as they can be said to exist as realized characters at all, but their repulsiveness is that of the two voluptuary and physically repulsive tormentors of Christ in Bosch's *The Crowning with Thorns* (the version in the London National Gallery, that is). It is the other two figures in that picture — the clean-shaven, grave-looking, neatly accoutered professional soldiers — who are the really frightening ones and who really matter. They are not only respectable, they in a sense *deserve* respect for some of their qualities; and I have no doubt at all that one could have found their equivalents among Massu's paratroopers, or in the SS or in almost any other organized body of violent men whose activities one particularly abominates or dreads. Violence, in such hands, is the cutting-edge of ideology — often, of course, of ideology that has become a whole life style — rather than the expression of inchoate and merely "personal" aberrations. And when in distinguished art one moves from more or less public figures like Twain's Colonel Sherburn, via someone like Goulay in George

Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters*, to such figures as Heathcliff and Ahab, one is, of course, involved even more strenuously with consequential value systems in terms of which it is altogether right and proper for certain kinds of atrocities to be committed. Hence to expose oneself empathetically to the full awfulness of those atrocities is to do more than simply expose oneself to "human nature" in the sense of discovering hitherto unsuspected depths of possible iniquitousness. It is also to realize more sharply what may be logically entailed in the value systems themselves—including how they overlap with or in a sense emerge from more "acceptable" ones—and hence to be able to respond to them more effectively. Shakespeare's major tragedies, I suppose, are the greatest examples we have of the sort of thing I am talking about; and I suspect that they are also the supreme examples of "cruel" art. In any case, they and some of the other works that I have mentioned, as well as a number of obvious ones that I've not mentioned, serve to remind us that the truly shocking in art occurs when the artist's gaze has been turned as firmly and in a sense disinterestedly as possible on concrete human behavior, and when he himself has been shocked by the capacity of people to pass violently beyond limits to which he himself has assented. It is ironical when admirers of writers like Sade or of some of our currently "cruel" authors endeavor to get outrageousness all on their own side, as it were, so that, emancipated and unshockable themselves, they watch comfortably as other people are outraged in piquant ways. Good art doesn't shock only the bourgeoisie, it shocks *everyone*.

John Fraser

RADICAL STYLES

More than any other writer today, Susan Sontag has suffered from bad criticism and good publicity. If she could be rescued from all her culture-hungry interpreters, it might be possible to find the writer who has been made into a symbol. This is no longer easy because a popular conception of her has been rigged before a natural one could develop — like a premature legend. Ironically, those who love her and those who hate her are equally responsible for the popular image, for both of them have inflated the flashier, more photogenic side of some of her subjects. The standard picture now in circulation is that of the up-to-date radical, a stand-in for everything advanced, extreme and outrageous, for artistic revolt, political disaffection, perversity and that peculiar combination of moral responsibility and moral irresponsibility associated with revolutionary movements — a fusion of Che and Genet. Middle-aged liberals are shocked by her politics and her aesthetics, and loudmouthed moral conservationists have been accusing her of trying to undermine the good old sexual establishment. On the other hand, a recent adulatory review endowed her with the kind of subversive wisdom only a great revolutionary prophet could have. And then there is the tintype of the smart rebel promoted a few years ago by the fashionable magazines and the commercial media with their cultural thermometers looking for the hottest things going in intellectual life. Naturally, they have struck gold in the Camp and the Hanoi pieces, and have ignored the rest of her writing. No wonder Susan Sontag's reputation has gone up and down as the literary stock market fluctuates — a celebrity one moment, a failure or a menace the next, and lately all at the same time.

These distortions reached their peak several years ago, but the effects still hang on. And Miss Sontag must also be having her difficulties coping with these standardized interpretations which harden into expectations. Who can keep up with his own legend? — particularly when it comes too early and is manufactured for the cultural trade. Fortunately for Miss Sontag she possesses several qualities which in some circumstances might be seen as shortcomings but

which in her situation work to her advantage. She is not, for example, a facile writer; hence she never adapts her style to her role. And her refusal to simplify her thinking, even at the risk of awkwardness, works like some kind of guidance system, constantly directing her toward herself.

My own view of Susan Sontag, I should say right off, is a biased one, in her favor. I must also admit to some personal satisfaction in her development into one of our most intelligent and exciting writers. I remember the first time I met her, ten years ago, at one of those brawls known as a cocktail party. I remember her shyness, taking the form of self-assurance, as she asked me how one gets to write a review for *PR*. Fumbling for a quick and clever reply, as one does desperately on these occasions, I said: "One asks." "O.K.," she said, "I'm asking." I remember, too, her saying one day she would like to do a piece on Camp. And I must confess that after she explained what she meant I thought it was a very good idea but not a headliner. And when I saw the manuscript, I thought it a remarkable essay, but I had no idea it would sweep the world of fashion. Nor did I foresee that she would become the intellectual darling of those publications that try to merge the serious with the mass market and make certain kinds of radicalism modish and profitable.

Of course, Miss Sontag is not responsible for this type of exploitation. Yet the posture of her thinking — and this involves her strengths as well as her weaknesses — does lend itself to extravagant and stylish responses. She seems to be staking out a new sensibility, and like many critics in the past who made an assault on traditional ideas her manner is strident, assertive and extravagant. (To what extent hers is a genuinely new sensibility — or, for that matter, to what extent any sensibility can be entirely new — is another question, not immediately pertinent to the effect of her writing.) Furthermore, since she is taken as a spokesman for *The New*, she is thought of as someone to take a stand for or against. Hence, as with so many of the younger writers, the reactions to her have fallen into the stereotypes of polarization. But because she is so articulate and takes all questions as her theoretical province, because her writing has political as well as literary implications, the polarization is both sharper and more distorting.

The situation is not a unique one, for radical movements have

always thrived on polarization as a way of defining themselves and of acquiring political momentum. And conservatives have always obliged by swinging in the other direction. Hence radicals — and genuine conservatives — have usually been contemptuous of the middle-ground, the natural habitat of rationalism, liberalism, intellectual balance — of all habits of mind that make for distinctions and qualifications, that shy away from excesses of feeling and thinking. But today, because the new radicalism makes a point of breaking with the past, while the older radicals feel called on to defend it, intellectual polarization is no longer confined to radicals and conservatives. It has come to dominate the form as well as the content of contemporary thinking. What we have now is a seesaw up and down between the challenge of the New Left and the backlash of the liberals and the Old Left. Perhaps this was inevitable, and surely it is preferable to the inertia of the fifties. But a debate made up of charges and countercharges is neither interesting nor productive. And the division of the younger activists and the older moderates into those who make history and those who judge it is just the current version of the old distinction between doing and thinking.

Susan Sontag is both an exponent and a victim of the new polarization: an exponent in that she doesn't go in for modulation and adjustment, a victim because her concern with speculative and literary problems often falls outside the prevailing left-right fashions. Hence she is not radical enough for the footloose generation and the new crop of militants who think with their feet, and she is too wild for those who get scared when they discover that the new movements do not look like the old ones. She is particularly frightening to those who do not like either their art or their politics to be open, fluid, uncertain, unbridled and youthful. She is too much a child of her time and too intelligent to accommodate to the placid thinking of an earlier period, yet she is too much addicted to theorizing and too much aware of complexities to be satisfied with a purely activist politics and aesthetics. All Susan Sontag's writing has these two sides: a skeptical mind steeped in the unsolved problems that make up the history of thought and a strong, almost willed, feeling for change and discovery, and for new ideas that are attractive because they cannot be insured by history.

Her new collection of essays continues — almost repetitively —

this concern with the links between the past and the present. The three best and most typical pieces, on Pornography, on Silence and on Vietnam, are essentially reexaminations of accepted ideas about art and politics. In all three — as in the other essays too — the point of view from which the accepted rules and definitions are revised is the malleable sense of literature and society that shapes writing and thinking today. But the language is the accepted language of criticism; and the assumption throughout is that the way to understand the current rejections of the past is through the continuities of criticism, and history. This has been the traditional role of criticism. And if at times her tone is apocalyptic and oracular, there are precedents in the essays of Ortega y Gasset, and the manifestos of the Futurists and the Surrealists.

Yet it is this self-assured and condensed style that offends most academic critics, this mode of assertion and speculation that disdains an orderly argument, that repeats old ideas with the same verve with which it explores new ones, that bypasses contemporary American criticism as though it didn't exist. Hence some of her criticism is thought to be homemade and half-baked by academicians brought up to be orderly. My own feeling, however, is that while rigorous analysis will reveal many such failings, it doesn't do justice to one of the few bold and original minds to be found among the younger critics. And anyway, the so-called order of most academic criticism comes from playing it safe. The usual run of criticism is devoted to the application and refinement of some accepted views of literature and society. When the going assumptions change, the kind of criticism that appears in most of the literary magazines suddenly shifts to new subjects and new methods, as it applies itself to illustrating the latest approach. Hence the succession of modes, each with its little army of critics — and campfollowers — in the last few decades: social criticism, myth criticism, symbolic criticism, textual criticism, metaphoric criticism, linguistic criticism. And the striking thing is the extent to which most critics work with borrowed and unconscious assumptions. Susan Sontag's shortcomings, on the contrary, are usually of her own making. Thus it can be said that the essay on Silence never really overcomes the ambiguities of the term, and it confuses the deflation of the human claims of art talked about by Ortega and exemplified in earlier abstract and experimental painting and writing with the deflation of art itself, in pop, rock, ephemeral

theater and movies that write off the medium. Nevertheless, it is an unusually sophisticated exploration of the theoretical implications of contemporary styles. Similarly, her discussion of pornography, though it doesn't sufficiently explain the difference between potboilers and literature, takes us out of the cozy limits that have kept literature safe for academic criticism. Her idea of a "pornographic imagination" goes beyond the liberal tolerance of a subject; it legitimizes a repressed faculty.

Actually, some of the implications of Susan Sontag's argument are more far-reaching than the flamboyant views with which she is associated. Despite the fact that she is an elitist, she suggests a way out of the predicament of elitism. For in pressing for the liberation of the arts from their history, Susan Sontag opens them up to popular exploitation, thus breaking with the elitist tradition which assumed serious art to be alienated from middle-class society and hence from the political and commercial manipulations of the mass mind. But it is also a break with the kind of adaptation to popular taste in the last few decades that made literature so conventional in form and in subject. The effect is to rescue the experimental tradition from its loss of power and the exhaustion of its subject, from its unbearable isolation as it struggled to remain both pure and advanced. In a sense, this is a formal solution to a social problem, the problem of the social role of art and its relation to an audience, for the loosening of style has made it possible to be at the same time popular and unconventional. Thus the period of Joyce and Kafka and Schoenberg and Picasso, instead of being a dead end — as it was for a few decades — becomes a live tradition again in the movies, in painting and in the new theater. The missing links, as Miss Sontag implies, are to be found in movements like Surrealism and Dada, which played with low subjects in a high style, but a style nevertheless that expressed a disdain for traditional style. And one of the striking things in Susan Sontag's essays is her recognition that the last few decades have been a kind of interlude during which avant-garde writing lost its elan, while most academic criticism went into the business of educating readers or talking vaguely about the relation of literature to society. This is why most of Miss Sontag's critical refer-

ences are to an earlier period and to the French who are often saved from banality by their aloofness from reality.

The essay on Silence is a good example of Susan Sontag's method. The idea of silence actually is used as a metaphor for the opposite of talkiness in art, talkiness being too full of subject matter, too directly aimed at an audience, too bustly in its language, too neatly constructed — all suggesting a closed, stale view of existence. Art that babbles thinks of itself as finished, with an audience out there, an inert, voyeuristic mass. Only a silent medium can properly engage an audience, because it is not performing but completing itself. The ideal form for Miss Sontag, as one would expect, is the movies, which is able to deal with subjects, that is, with verbal material, by splintering and transforming them into immediate visual associations and experiences. And several long and quite brilliant essays in the book, on Godard, Bergman and the relation of theater to film, explore the possibilities of the most modern art. She has also just made one striking movie and is about to do another. I, myself, have not found enough successful movies to be convinced they can replace other genres; but clearly there is today a greater artistic investment in the movies than in any other art, and this must have something to do with the way things are going. But I should say I do not know enough about movies to have strong feelings on the subject. Aside from the question, however, whether Miss Sontag is right about the fate of the various media, the implications of her method are important. Throughout all her essays, she attacks the idea of the separation of form and content as the main source of the illegitimate moral and social demands on art, particularly since the dichotomy, she says, leads to the primacy of content. This is not exactly a new idea for academic criticism, though her insistence that despite all disclaimers the separation of theme from form is rooted in our cultural habits goes beyond the usual analysis. Nor is she able to solve the problem, which, I suspect, is not soluble today because the terms in which it is put preclude a solution. But the most suggestive approaches have been taken by younger critics like Susan Sontag and Richard Poirier who argue that style is the shape and meaning of the "content"; and that an examination of the style is an examination of the "subject." (Susan Sontag thinks of "material" rather than

“content” being molded by style.) The trouble with this view is that so long as we are locked into the old language and the old categories it leads less gifted critics to exalt any kind of formal innovation and to downgrade thematic innovation. But, then, the critics who ride a new approach always run it into the ground.

Miss Sontag has also been taken down for not displaying in her own work the abandon and playfulness her aesthetic calls for. There is, of course, a quality of intense dedication in her writing, suggesting a generational gap between her intelligence and her sensibility. And sometimes there is an elevation of tone which endows “art” with the very sanctity she is constantly questioning. Nor is she a witty writer. But the play of her mind is to be found in her speculative sensibility, expressed more in the texture of her thinking than in her writing.

Another familiar charge is that Miss Sontag’s aesthetic comes down to a celebration of novelty. Usually, this indictment takes the crudest form and is proved by ignoring what she actually has said. Whatever basis there is for the accusation is to be found in her observation that contemporary art is less concerned with the quality of a finished work than with the process and the idea of making it. Nor does she dissociate herself from this attitude; on the contrary, she regards it as basic to the entire modern tradition. She points out, correctly, I think, the sources in such figures as Joyce, Picasso and Beckett of the tendency today to break down the formal structures of art through irony, self-parody and the free play of the medium that calls into question its very existence. This does not mean the end of critical judgment, which is what Susan Sontag is accused of by critics with a large stake in the past. All that can be said is that she has failed to reconcile the new deflation of art with the old merit system. But Miss Sontag can’t be held responsible for a dilemma all modern criticism has failed to resolve: the dilemma of how to judge — or relate — new works that defy the old criteria. One could say glibly, as I myself have, that the old standards are transformed in the act of responding to new works. But this is no more than a ready-made formula, at best a summary of a long process, full of mistakes and contradictions, scarcely applicable to any single act of judging, and not very useful when faced with a radically different movement or work. Such critical schemes, even one so striking as Eliot’s about tradition and innovation, are essentially retroactive

explanations of very uneven, complicated and unpredictable developments. More pertinent and immediate is the force of talent. For new styles are set by strong subversive talents that overcome the inertia of taste and change the rules of art. This would seem to leave open the problem of how to recognize such talent, but, fortunately, there always seem to be a certain number of writers whose eye for new talent is not blinded by theoretical or generational prejudices.

The collection also includes Susan Sontag's long essay on her trip to Hanoi and a short reply to a political questionnaire in *PR*. So far as I can recall they are her first excursions into politics, and though both are spirited and sophisticated they lack the depth and the daring of the best of her criticism, not the daring to oppose the system, but to question *all* assumptions. It must be said, however, that politics is now more resistant than art to new ideas, and the level of these pieces is much higher than most political writing today. The earlier statement is mainly a testament of belief: as such it is quite moving, and even the famous extravaganza about the white race being the cancer of history should be understood as an expression of anger and disgust. The Hanoi story is partly an intellectual diary but mostly an account of the conflict between her political feelings and her intellectual reservations—between, that is, her sympathies with the North Vietnamese and all the ironies and subtleties of thinking that make her an overconscious child of the West. Predictably, her feelings won.

The tortured honesty and clarity of Susan Sontag's analysis is quite impressive, and I am scarcely doing justice in this quick summary to the awareness that makes her self-examination an important document of radical thought. But I am more concerned at the moment with what I think is its exemplification of the dilemma of the Left. What I mean is that Susan Sontag's discussion of the aims of the North Vietnamese and the role of the United States has great moral and emotional force but fails to put them in any new or large political perspective. It reduces, the combat to the good guys vs. the bad guys. And this is one of the reasons why Miss Sontag has trouble squaring all the complexities of thought and social vision that have come out of the West, including its radical ideas, with the villainy

of the Americans. Obviously, the policies of the United States make no sense morally, politically, militarily, not even in its own terms, in terms, that is, of "anti-communism" or the "national interest." But it should be clear by now that opposition to the war — or to America — is scarcely enough on which to build new socialist policies or theories. Nor is it any reason to romanticize all revolutionary or militant movements, or to fail to distinguish, say, between the advanced consciousness of the revolutionary Czechs and the tragic limitations of the North Vietnamese, who, after all, were forced to support the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. My own feeling is that the brightest revolutionary hopes have been sustained by the Czechs, who brought to socialism a glimpse of its human possibilities. And I suspect it is an awareness of these distinctions, not the intellectual baggage of the West, that kept Susan Sontag from identifying with the Vietnamese, despite all her good will.

But whether or not one agrees with her analysis, her speculations are so wide-ranging that one is led to think about many of the questions occupying the Left. And a central one is to be able to distinguish between movements claiming to be revolutionary or socialist. I am not talking, let me make clear, only about democracy in societies or movements calling themselves socialist, though I see no reason for pretending not to care about it just because some anti-Communists were unable to think about anything else, and I am aware that many of the old arguments for democracy served to dismiss all radical activity. The truth is that the warnings about democracy, while they have alerted us to the dangers of Stalinism, have not led to any democratic radical movements. What I have in mind is some kind of objectivity, some overall political view, that might permit one to be partially sympathetic with the aims of some radical movements without losing one's critical faculties or giving up one's real goals. For example, it is one thing to believe that Western-style democracy is not possible in primitive countries, and that to insist on democratic socialist movements in Asia or Latin America amounts to a rejection of any revolutionary activity. But it is something else to write off the West and rest all one's hopes in backward revolutionary forces. Unfortunately this stance is fashionable now and one can understand its appeal to those, like the Blacks, who expect

nothing from existing societies. But for many radicals it is an inauthentic position, requiring a will to reject all one's political knowledge and experience.

I am also not talking about the old complaints concerning the New Left's lack of a theory or a program — which Susan Sontag is very much aware of. These are disingenuous too, in that it is the program and not the lack of one that is found objectionable. Nor has the solicitude for theory provided any new theories, or any solution to modern problems. I am convinced that only an anti-theoretical, antihistorical, non-Marxist, unstructured movement like that of the youth today could have created a new left force in the West. The fact is that the Left was paralyzed by Stalinism; and anti-Stalinists, some of whom became "anti-Communists," were frozen into the role of oppositionists. Apparently, a new movement could resolve the old dilemmas only by overrunning them, like a flood that disregards the old barriers. And the fact that the New Left has no fixed system strikes me as one of its promising traits, for it indicates the kind of open, transitional and unpredictable movement that has some chance of maturing and spreading across national boundaries, into the Communist countries as well as the West. Only its paternal critics seem to know exactly where youth is going.

Still, if we can go by the past, it is unlikely that those militants who disdain radical history and theory will be able to escape some of the old predicaments. For antiideologists have usually been concealed ideologists; and political empiricism is itself an ideology, full of hidden assumptions. Thus the black militants and the white radicals who attack Israel as an "agent of imperialism" are merely parroting Marxist slogans out of context. The recent statements by Stokely Carmichael, supporting the Arabs against the Jews, are particularly reminiscent of Stalinist manipulations, in the way they try to connect Russian and Arab interests with those of the blacks in America. If Nasser can be said to represent a humane, socialist force, then we must reconsider what is meant by socialism. An analagous, though more complex phenomenon, is the recent seizure of universities. For, however sympathetic one might be with the aims of the students, it must be said that their strategy often looks like a parody of Lenin's and Trotsky's blueprints for the seizure of power. As the Czechs pointed out, when the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia they

occupied the buildings of the government and the news media, not the university of Prague, or P.S. 162.

In general, perhaps an even more important problem is that unless one has some general idea of the kind of society one would like to see and of the forces working to create it, he tends to go for *any* militant act and *any* radical doctrine, the more militant and radical the better. The result is to transform a tactic into an end, converting politics into a game in which the new radicals trump the old ones. And such a celebration of intransigence, we know, plays into the hands of those who make more noise and are better organized. This is actually the predicament today of the New Left, dramatically indicated by the recent split of SDS into two factions, the PLP hard-liners and the old student softies. In this case the militants are also the more disciplined, more programmatic group, so the choice narrows down to a return to Stalinization or a continuation of loose, improvised politics.

Two other dilemmas, one involving the generation gap, the other the question of patriotism, seem to me to be important, too. For the first time in history the revolutionary movement has been identified with the youth movement. Again, we can understand the necessity for such a break with the symbols of the past in order to energize a New Left, and we can only admire the adventurousness and innocence with which the idea of dissent has been endowed. But the theoretical and practical consequences of what amounts to a new class conflict are so enormous they can scarcely be imagined. The immediate effect is to make politics literary and to create a permanent generational revolution in politics as well as art. In the past, art and politics have been distinct: new art movements have been generational and youthful, announcing their aims in the form of arrogant and defiant gestures, while political movements, indifferent to age or style, have spoken in the name of society as a whole. Today, however, the new politics is creating a situation in which political thinkers, like writers, are swept aside by the younger rebels as soon as they mature. No wonder Marcuse can't compete with Che. And, only in this situation could someone like Eldridge Cleaver, for instance, who is really a gifted and courageous writer, be elevated into a political theorist.

The feeling of disaffection from America, particularly by Amer-

icans, is another symptom of a politics of gesture. The mood is easy to understand, but its political meaning is something else. It is almost as if the United States were excluded from the traditional sense of roots and of belonging to a specific community. Or that it is outside the range of radical politics, despite the fact that youth movements in many other countries take their cue from the Americans. So far as I know, the United States is the only country where national concerns and loyalties are assumed to be incompatible with radical objectives. No one is anti-Russian, or anti-British or anti-French, inside or outside those countries. What we have in this country is a kind of nationalism turned inside out, which would explain why patriotism here has become the property of demagogues. And I suspect that a radical movement totally alienated from its country would be doomed to a fringe existence, like that of an avant-garde movement in the arts. But this reversal has also had a peculiar effect on radical thinking: it has created false political categories by confusing national perspectives with international ones. Thus both the U.S. and the Soviet Union are sometimes criticized for their pursuit of national interests, at other times for their opposition to socialist forces. (Incidentally, much of the talk about "national interest," even by sophisticated students of international affairs like Hans Morgenthau, strikes me as a mishmash of politics and morality. Most of the liberal guardians of the so-called national interest are not so dedicated to the "national interest" as their patriotic opponents: they are moral and political critics of American policies who try to justify their criticism by arguing that these policies do not serve American interests. Actually the defense of the "national interest" involves hard and ruthless considerations and indifference to the effect on other peoples or the cost to humanity as a whole — all of which are not characteristic of liberal thinking. Playing ball with the Arabs or with the Greek government, for example, might serve the "national interest." And it is conceivable that it might be to Russia's or China's or America's interest under some circumstances to use the bomb.)

And, to extend the confusion, the Arab countries are supported or condemned mostly on nationalist grounds, though they are vaguely connected by their supporters with progressive forces. The Vietnamese are occasionally identified with socialist causes, but usually

it is their nationalist aspirations that command sympathy. On the whole, anti-Americanism has become identified in many parts of the world with socialism and national liberation, though not, significantly, in the communist countries of Eastern Europe, and it is often used as a substitute for socialist theory. As Trotsky pointed out, this is upside-down politics: if all one had to do, said Trotsky, is to reverse what one's opponents were saying it would be easy to be a revolutionary thinker. Besides, in this case it has turned Stalin's theory of "socialism in one country" into its opposite: "*anti-socialism* in one country." Clearly, what is lacking is some large perspective for assessing nations and movements throughout the world, one in which the aims of the Czech students for example, could be seen in relation to the American Blacks, or the Asian peasants or the French workers and all in relation to national policies.

These are some of the questions I found myself thinking about as I read Susan Sontag's new book. And if there are no answers to many of them, it might be because this is a time not for rigor and caution in politics and criticism but for boldness in disarding stale ideas and trying out untested ones. This, it seems to me, is one of her main achievements. Miss Sontag has given some shape and will to a new sensibility in art and politics, but, appropriately, without systems or programs. Hence she has been able to speculate about many of the contradictions facing those who are both aware of the past and open to new literary and political experience. Isn't this enough? — even if she can't satisfy her conservative critics or keep up with the latest styles in radicalism.

William Phillips

THE MAKING OF AMERICANS

JOURNAL OF DANIEL

May the first

I have decided to start a Journal. Maybe it will keep my mind off the Outside and the Man. Besides somebody might decide to publish it someday, and then they'll make a movie of it and I could be the star. I'd be good too, because once I was in a play and everyone said I was great. I think it was my looks, because when I walk down the street people always stop and stare at me. I asked my fiancée about it and she insisted it was because I'm unusually handsome. She said there's nothing strange about me.

I wish I could believe that, but in a way I don't. I don't mind being strange that much. Actually it gives me a lot of insight into people and life and reality. I feel this great power inside me and now that I actually think about it, I am grateful to God that He decided to put me in this Hospital. I know that this power in me will heal all the patients here. I told my fiancée I wanted to go to a mental hospital, because I knew that as soon as I walked in everybody would rise, and leave, cured.

I've been here two weeks now and I feel the power growing every day. I told my Doctor about it and he understood. He said, "Yes, I see," and I think he realized that he was in a divine presence. There's this girl Janet that I met in the waiting room. She said they told her she's a schizophrenic. One night she saw this man following her. It wasn't really a man, she said, it was a shadow. So she cut her wrist with a razor blade. I told her to look in my eyes and repeat after me, "I have just seen God. I have just seen God." She did that and she really changed and became more thoughtful. I know that I have cured her and that I shall cure all the other patients in the same way.

May the second

I cannot say how I feel about my fiancée. I have talked about her with my Doctor and he says that I am a racist in reverse. It really hurt me when he said that. But he is a black man too so he would have no reason to hurt me. I just felt like killing someone when he said that. I just felt like killing someone when he said that. Then my fiancée came in to visit me and I told her what my Doctor had said to me. I explained that it had nothing to do with her being white or with us having an interracial marriage. But she didn't hear me. She just turned white and started crying. Not really crying. I could tell she was holding it in, but still there were tears running down her cheeks.

Now if I were going to do this scene in a movie, I would probably have a flashback to an incident that happened before I came into the Hospital. It was last year when Melanie—that's my fiancée—and I were living together. We weren't engaged then. I had been telling Melanie how sometimes I felt like killing someone to teach him a lesson and she got upset and went into the living room and started studying. I went into the kitchen and I saw this big knife lying in the sink. I don't know why but I picked it up and crept up behind Melanie and then I yelled her name and pretended to stick her, but it was only a joke. I know that because I was laughing when I did it and wasn't mad at her like I am sometimes. Anyway Melanie screamed and then she started crying. But she promised me she'd never tell anyone and then we went into the bedroom and made love for a long time and after a while she felt better and forgot about it.

That's one thing I like about Melanie. She always forgets about things. Like today when I told her about being a racist in reverse, after a while she looked okay again. And then we just talked about Anthony. Anthony's this soul-brother of mine who dropped out of school because he's going with a white girl and he got upset and couldn't study anymore. So now he's been drafted and he's planning to go in.

So we talked about Anthony for a while and then Melanie had to go and she kissed me good-bye. I said "Je t'aime" like I always do.

May the third

I wish they had more to do in this hospital. I'm getting very

tired of being in here. Besides, I am needed by my black Brothers and Sisters and I'm worried about them. Journal, I feel that it is my Mission to help my people. I feel this very strongly and I guess I have all my life. But the first time I was conscious of it was last year when Melanie told me something which made me realize my Mission and my Fate. It was then that I knew once and for all that I cannot run away from myself and I must not try. It happened when Melanie and I were down in Monterey for part of the Christmas vacation. We went into this very fancy Oriental restaurant that overlooked the sea. Even though we just had on blue jeans and sweat shirts, Melanie marched right past the waiters into the cocktail lounge and sat down at the table at the far end. It was the only table with picture windows on all three sides. The lounge was built on a long pier, and we could hear the waves swirling underneath our feet. We could look out one window and see the sun going down, and out another and watch the moon coming up. I felt like we were on a magical island and that this moment was being painted onto the scroll which is my memory. We asked for two empty glasses and this shy Filipino girl brought them without a word. I uncorked this bottle of red wine that I had hidden under my sweat shirt, and when no one was looking I poured the elegant red wine into the tall elegant red glasses. These Oriental musicians played slow strange music and women in tight long gold dresses with stiff high gold collars walked in and out. I looked out at the sea falling back towards the Indian Ocean and then I looked quietly at the person who believes in me more than anyone else — Melanie.

Melanie seemed to be thinking of something long ago, and she looked past me towards the sea as she always does when she's contemplating. After a while she said, "Daniel, I want to tell you something. And I want you to think about it. — Last year I wanted very much to start this tutoring project and I put hours and hours into it. But a lot of adults were uptight about it and they made life miserable for me in all sorts of ways. Finally when I was out on a date I just broke down crying. When my date — he was a white guy — finally understood why I was upset he just said, 'Melanie, why don't you just forget the whole thing. Really.'" At this point Melanie stopped and looked at me instead of the sea. I could see from her eyes that she was really hurt just remembering it, and I twined my fingers tightly around hers. Then she went on. "So

Daniel I just told this white guy the truth. I said that if I gave up now, I'd never be able to look at myself in a mirror again without spitting, without hating myself."

I pressed Melanie's fingers and she lowered her head and kissed my hand. Then she looked up at me very intensely, but at the same time very softly. When Melanie looks at me she talks with her eyes; and this time her eyes were telling me of her great dreams for me and my future. It was at this time that I first became conscious of my power. It was then that I knew that God, speaking through Melanie, had called upon me to lead my People out of bondage. Melanie knew that I had understood and we pressed our fingers together, pressing the knowledge into our minds. And then we toasted to Freedom without moving our lips and drank our wine, the red wine — we drank of the blood of those who had suffered Before that I might come to save them Now.

May the fourth

Well, Journal, I have just told my Doctor all about what I wrote to you yesterday. As soon as I finished talking, my Doctor shook my hand and said "Brother." Then he told me about how he's going to give this speech at a Black Power Conference in L.A. and wishes I could come. I wish I could too. I'm actually pretty tired of being here. I told my Doctor I feel fine and am all ready to leave. He said he'd see what he could do.

Then later that day this Psychologist guy came to talk to me. He was white and I think he's probably pretty hung up on sex. There was something about him that I despised. He made me sick and I wouldn't talk to him.

When Melanie came she brought me this letter from my father. I'll copy out this one paragraph from it to keep in the Journal.

Daniel, we want you back in the house when you'll act like a man. You're creating chaos in the family. When you decide to change your ways, you can come back. Not until then.

I showed that part to Melanie and she didn't say anything at first. Then she said well he's probably still mad about Francine and Chico. Francine is my kid sister. She got married to this Puerto Rican — Chico. I really admire Chico because he came up the hard

way. He's my Brother and even if he's not black he's still not Caucasian.

May the fifth

Melanie brought me some flowers today. In one way I was glad because flowers are the gift of God and are very beautiful. But also it made me melancholy because it made me think of how much I want to get out of here and just go walking in the park with Melanie.

I really love my fiancée although I don't like to tell her about it because she gets so lovey-dovey and I hate that. But sometimes when she's asleep I tell her all these things and once when she was sitting in the park I stood and watched her for a long time before she knew I was there. My friend Anthony drew this beautiful picture of her and I hung it up on the wall opposite our bed. Then I put these purple beads around it. I miss that picture. I wish my Brother Anthony would stop being a Tom and say NO to the army. I've got to get out of here so I can talk to him.

May the sixth

Melanie was really upset today. Actually she was terrified. I'd never seen her so upset. You see, Journal, all these Sisters who really dig me (I'm pretty popular) have been getting their nails into her for being engaged to me. And now Melanie is afraid to walk in the park because she knows she'll most likely meet one of the Sisters. Sometimes they spit at her and call her names. I guess she had a run-in with them this afternoon. I tried to explain to her that the black woman is the lowest on the totem pole but she didn't think that was any excuse. So then I got tired of explaining and told her to go home and get some rest. She got really upset then and started telling me all these faults I have. I wrote them all down so I could think about them later on. Then I got up to go look out the window when she was finished. She burst out crying. I asked what was the matter but she wouldn't tell me. She said I should know by now what was the matter. But I didn't know. So I just ignored her and finally she left. I kept reading over what she had said to me. But I really think Melanie's got to stop being so dependent on me. Here's what she said:

You're very selfish and self-centered.
You just don't know when you're hurting someone.
Your father was right. I don't blame him for kicking you out.
You're so busy listening to God you don't know how to listen to people anymore.

Actually all of this stuff is pretty old. She's said it before and I know it's all probably true. I don't feel really hurt about it. I guess I'll just think about it and try to perfect my inner Self. But the only thing that really hurt me was when she said this:

I don't believe that stuff about you talking to Benjamin Franklin through Abraham Lincoln. And look it Daniel, you don't believe it either.

I feel I must write Melanie about this. If she doesn't have faith in me, our marriage won't ever work. Sometimes I look at her and I feel dizzy. How can I marry a Caucasian girl. Maybe my Doctor was right. I thought a lot about it and then I talked to my Doctor. He agreed with me and said I should write Melanie a letter.

May the seventh

Melanie didn't come today so I guess I'll just mail the letter. I am keeping this copy of it for my Journal:

Dear Melanie,

You know I love you with all my heart, but everyday I feel my heart getting weaker. When I saw you today all upset and dependent on me, I just wanted to tear your breast off.

Melanie I love you but the blood from my heart is flowing away and my hands are red and wet.

Daniel

May the eighth

My younger brother Frank — we call him Sonny — came to visit me today. He's Francine's twin brother. I remember the first time Melanie came to visit and we were all in the kitchen — Sonny, and Francine, Chico and Melanie and me. We were all fooling around and I was feeling pretty good. Then Sonny, who had been acting sort of distant, said something pretty pointed — "Now we have *two* in the family." Then he turned on his heel and walked out. I thought he was going to spit in my fiancée's face. Later that

night I heard Melanie saying to my sister Michelle, "Everyone hates me because I'm white." Michelle's very sensible. She's my favorite sister. She just said, "Melanie, you've got to stop that." And that's the last I ever heard of it. Except once when my Grandmother, who's pretty old-fashioned, wouldn't let Melanie stay over. And Melanie glared at her and said, "It's because I'm white, isn't it?" My grandmother didn't deny it and I felt pretty weak.

When Sonny came today I didn't have much to say to him. He said that Ma's in the hospital because she's so upset she swelled up all over. Then he told me that Dad forgave Francine and let her come back in the house and go visit Ma. But Dad still won't visit me, Sonny says.

There were all these pauses as I didn't have much to say. There's not many people I can talk with, who really understand me anymore. Just my Doctor and Melanie and of course Michelle. So then Sonny left and I said "Keep the Faith, Brother," and he gave me a soul handshake.

I've taught Melanie all the soul handshakes and a lot of other things besides. There's a lot she didn't know — like if you're a girl you never leave your man's side when you're at a party. And under no circumstances do you start talking with some other cat unless I'm talking to him first. At first she made a lot of mistakes and ... was really embarrassed. People said like I wasn't really her man and she was just using me until something better came along. Then after that they'd start in on how any black man who's proud of his Origin wouldn't hang around with white trash. But I really yelled at Melanie when we got home after the party, and now she doesn't make so many mistakes. But she hardly ever goes to parties anymore, which makes me mad, because I like to have her by my side when I'm talking to someone.

May the ninth

Melanie didn't come again today. I had a long talk with the Doctor about it. He couldn't understand why I'd really care about her. He always calls white people "fey." This is the slang of his generation for "foe" — which is what the White Man is.

I told the Doctor how I always felt that my personal relationships and private life should have nothing to do with my politics.

The Doctor asked me how I met Melanie. I told him how

we were both in a demonstration together protesting the murder of a black man by some honkie police. Then she got caught and put in jail but I escaped (mainly because they were after “hippies” that time, not niggers). Well, Melanie didn’t exactly get caught. She just refused to run and said, “I’m with them,” and marched into the paddy wagon. Melanie told me that when she told how she got arrested to all the hippies that were caught with her, the hippies laughed and laughed and told her she was crazy.

Once at Christmas time I told Melanie how I remembered looking back while we were marching in that demonstration and seeing this barefoot girl skipping along with some kids holding her hands. Melanie said, “Oh that must have been me.” Then I told Melanie that when I first saw that girl I thought to myself, “She’s weak.” Melanie got really upset when I told her that. I remember she ran outside and kicked a tree. When I talked about it with her later, she said, “I think you’re telling me that — about me being weak — is a warning that we’re — you and I — going to be having some trouble, some difficulties, sort of like a test of our relationship.” Melanie was really right about that. Because after that everything started going downhill and we’d fight a lot and be afraid of each other sometimes. But everytime after we’d make up, Melanie would always say, “Do you think we’re over it yet?” And I would always say, “No, not yet.”

I remember that the same day we had our first “test,” Melanie and Anthony got into a fight. I didn’t hear them talking, but it was something about sex and Anthony accusing Melanie of tricking a guy. Melanie ran outside and I sluged Anthony. Then when I found Melanie I made Anthony apologize to her. It’s the only time Anthony and I ever fought. We’re like brothers. We are Brothers.

But you know, Journal, as I was telling all this to the Doctor, I realized it wasn’t Melanie that was that weak girl at all. It was some other Caucasian chick. I told this to the Doctor but he didn’t seem to care. “What’s the difference? They’re all the same,” he said. I respect and love my Doctor, Journal. But sometimes he really hurts me. I suppose he was right when he said I needed a rest in a Hospital but I don’t feel any better. I feel worse. As a matter of fact, I feel like shit.

May the tenth

Melanie still hasn't come and I'm getting scared. When my sister Michelle came today, I asked her to go look for Melanie and bring her back. Michelle understood and didn't ask any questions. She loves Melanie like a sister and really wants her to be my wife.

That sounds strange — Melanie, my wife — I wonder if maybe we, well Journal, I love Melanie with all my heart, but I feel like I'm getting weaker and weaker. My heart beat is slowing down and I think maybe I'm dying.

May the eleventh

Last night I had this horrible dream. It was actually a nightmare. When I woke up this morning I was sweating all over. I still feel awful but I won't tell this dream to Melanie because she always gets scared when I tell her my nightmares and relates them too much to her. I still feel weak, like there's this soggy damp cloth clinging to my brain and sloshing dirty water into my eyes. This is the dream:

Everyone in my family except me caught this very strange disease. Their skin started turning from black to white. First slowly, and then great blotches would turn sort of murky yellow then this ashy grey color and then finally this ugly white. I didn't know what to do. They made me sick to look at. Then everyone in the neighborhood started yelling "Black ghettos for the blacks" and waving knives and things. And then I didn't know what to do so I grabbed this knife from a kitchen and stabbed everyone in my family — including my Grandmother who's actually pretty Caucasian-looking to begin with — and I stabbed my whole family in their backs very slowly over and over again. And their blood flowed out and turned black. Then their blood started coming out like black water faster and faster and I drowned. Then I woke up and I was coughing.

When I told the Doctor about it he asked me if it reminded me of anything. I thought and then I remembered once, when Melanie and I decided to go to a Spanish restaurant and she ordered me something but wouldn't tell me what it was. What they gave me looked like meat or fish in some black sauce. After I'd eaten some of it she started laughing and laughing. So I asked her well what was this stuff anyway. And Melanie whispered, "It's squid cooked in its own ink." And I got sick all over the table.

May the twelfth

Michelle came back today and my Doctor let us go for a walk outside in the garden. I was afraid to ask her about Melanie and she didn't bring up the subject herself.

Oh God. Thank you for today. It was so beautiful outside. As I walked along with my sister I felt like I was walking in Heaven. I felt beautiful and I knew my black skin shined in the sun. I looked at my sister Michelle and I felt proud to be her brother and her Brother. The Doctor has really helped me. I know now that the black race will reign — in Ethiopia and Vietnam and China and Argentina and right here in California. I felt this Beauty in me and I felt like a Saint. I turned to Michelle and I almost sang to her. "Soul sister," I said. She smiled. Right then a leaf fell. "Did you know, Michelle, when a leaf falls here what happens on exactly the opposite spot on the other side of the Earth?" "No," she said, laughing with God's joy. "Well Michelle. I'll tell you. When a leaf falls here, a leaf falls at the same time on the other side of the Earth and this keeps our planet on its orbit." "But Daniel," she teased, "What if it's the Indian Ocean on the other side?" "Then," I responded in a strong dark voice, "a dead fish falls to the bottom of the sea. And so the earth is kept in motion."

Just then someone tapped me. I turned, expecting it to be Melanie and my heart pounded. But it was only Janet — the schizophrenic. She wanted to "thank me for pointing the way to the Holy Land of the Heart." She said that over and over. I said "Amen" and walked away. I didn't feel like talking to Janet anymore.

I remember when Melanie and I went for walks in the Park. And also once in Monterey when we went for a walk by the sea. That time, I remember, I climbed way out on this huge rock with the waves coming at me. I stayed up on that rock for hours and I forgot about everything else — about Melanie and leaving college and my mission and like I say, Melanie waiting for me on the shore. I just became hypnotized to the mystic ache of the Ocean. I felt this huge oneness calling me — begging me to join with it in union beneath the waves. The ocean was pulling me, pulling me, and I had to struggle with all my might to keep from jumping in and falling to the Palace of the One glowing beneath the waters.

May the thirteenth

Journal, I had to force myself to write today. I don't know what to think. The orderly brought me this letter. The orderly is Black and I am sure he is a messenger of God. The letter's envelope was lavender and so was the stationery.

The letter was from Melanie. It was a poem in French. I'll copy it into my journal:

*Mon amant est penseur.
Mon amant est pensant.
Ses pensées se penchant
Vers la ligne qui entoure*

*Là qu'on appelle la conscience.
Il nage dans la vallée
Couvert des abres glacées
Il se perd dans la cave mystérieuse*

*Là dans le monde des songes il vit
Dans une maison manquant des miroirs
A chaque porte, chaque pas, chaque couloir
Est debout un mourant esprit*

*La main rit dans son sangre
Je cherche une porte d'échappe
Je tire la main. Là une porte. Je frappe.
Elle s'ouvre. Je me couvre.
C'est tard . . . c'est trop
tard. Dans la noir il flotte.*

*Mon amant mon amant
Le penseur, jamais pensant
Celui-là n'est pas vrai.
C'est un songe, pas réalité.*

I asked the Messenger to bring me a French dictionary and I finally got it translated. The Messenger is from Haiti so he helped me—I know for a fact now that the orderly was sent by God and when I finish writing in you, my Journal, I shall offer up a prayer of thanks to the Almighty. This is how he translated Melanie's poem.

*My lover is a thinker
My lover is thinking*

*His thoughts are leaning
Towards the line encircling*

*That which one calls consciousness.
He swims in the valleys
Covered with iced trees.
He is lost in the mysterious cave.*

*There, in the world of dreams he lives
In a house without mirrors.
At each door, each step, each corridor
Is standing a dying spirit.*

*The hand laughs in its blood.
I look for a door of escape
I pull the hand. There a door. I knock.
It opens. I cover my face.
It's late. . . . It's too
Late. In the blackness he is floating.*

*My lover my lover
The thinker, ever thinking.
This story is not true.
It's a dream, not reality.*

I think it sounds very lovely in French. So does the Messenger. He read it to me and it seemed like a lullaby that the ocean waves were whispering to my hot and thirsty mind. But when I learned what it meant it really scared me.

I remember once before when Melanie spoke of a vision — the two of us were sitting around in a dark room with some friends. Melanie started telling about this huge clock that kept ticking tick-ing ticking. Some pale gloves kept pushing the clock's hour hand closer to midnight. Then it struck and a cat jumped out and tore apart a rat that was sitting on top of the number twelve.

Sometimes I do not understand Melanie and wonder if she's alright. I don't think I will show this poem to my Doctor.

May the fourteenth

I do not know what to think about this poem. I do not know what Melanie is trying to tell me. And today I am even more confused. Michelle came again today and we went for another walk in the Hospital garden. When I saw Janet I turned around and made sure I avoided her.

The sun was shining golden jewels all over the grass. I put on my shades and looked really cool. As usual, everyone stared at me. I wish that the Hospital gate was open and I could just walk out and go find Melanie.

So Michelle and I were just walking along without saying anything. I saw an old lady and she smiled at me. "Michelle," I said, "I know that God has sent me here. He has sent me here to receive the gift of that old lady's smile." And I tipped my beret to the old lady. I always wear a black beret and black motorcycle jacket now. This is the official uniform of the Black Panthers and I hope I'll become a member soon. I wish I could get out of here. I must help my Brothers. I must save them. Oh how I hear so strongly their cry of pain and of anger.

I was thinking about all of this when Michelle asked me a question. I was very surprised. "Daniel. Melanie wants to know if you have written any reply to her letter." "Melanie. Where is she?" I asked. "I don't know, Daniel. She wouldn't tell anyone where she was staying. She just left a note for me to ask you if you had an answer. She left a letter to me with Sonny." I was mad. Why was Sonny the only one home at a time like this. "Well? Do you have a letter for Melanie?" asked Michelle. I looked down. I really had nothing to say to my fiancée. I couldn't even say "Je t'aime" anymore because I just didn't know. My Doctor had said "Forget her." I'm trying, Journal, but it just seems like I can't. "No Michelle. I have no answer." But then Michelle said: "Well Daniel, then I'm supposed to give you this." And she gave me another lavender envelope. I opened it and again there was lavender stationery and again it was a poem.

LATE ONE NIGHT IN CHURCH: A VISION

*sometimes I fear the morning
Voice of the Imperative
Tinfoil Angel
who speaks
of the three-altared
chapel. I dread
the voice reminding me
of my dream the night before.*

*The Angel need only command
and there in Gothic grey*

*appears the first altar
welcoming me.
Instead of a Cross is a Roman couch
painted on a Roman wall. And dancing about
are the white silk sleeves
of a Princess's gown. Her prince is bending down.
(me in the corner, damp and young
Stung by the resentment eyes of a Universe
of Two)*

*The second altar calls me in
— Come about and join to worship
Within the curlicues airy
wood
Sounds an organ darkened wine-red
(Glimpses above and below
of soundless mahogany locked
into madness)*

*So to the third I muffling step
— Beckoned only by elegant black
Table holding in graceful hands
an Orange with veins protruding out
from pins
growing deep within
its Orange heart*

*For Christ's Sake! Let me out
I turn to flee the impossible
The joy of two the sound locked in,
The fruit that rips and scratches
my throat*

*Soldered and welded the bars create
Black splintered diamonds
— the iron lines of my cage.*

"Now do you have an answer?" Michelle asked after I'd read it. But I didn't. I really didn't know what to say. I told Michelle to explain to Melanie that I would have a reply for her tomorrow, and I left Michelle at the gate.

May the fifteenth

When I woke up this morning I felt in a panic. I felt like everything was closing in. After lunch I asked the orderly from Haiti for a coat hanger. I took it and wound it all around the metal grating in front of my window. I felt like someone was pushing in. I knew I must ask for Divine Guidance and I meditated for a long time

in my closet. I was afraid to cut my meat at lunch because I felt like taking the knife and slitting my throat. The Doctor came by while I was busy with the coat hanger. I didn't hear him coming in or I would have stopped him from reading Melanie's poems, which were lying on my bed. But it was too late.

"Daniel" he said. His voice was hard. There was no soul-brother sound in it. Christ I was scared. But I didn't show it. I just stood there with my back to him holding on to the grating. "Daniel. You must forget about this fey *girl*. You and Melanie are *through*." I didn't know what to say. I didn't look around. I just nodded and kept winding the hanger around. Finally the Doctor left. I looked out through the grating across past the Hospital wall and the sea beyond. The sky was dull and the San Francisco Bay was almost grey. The waves heaved and fell like huge black tongues, and the water rolled up like a monster's white eyes. The Bay was an awful color. It looked polluted.

I'm glad the Doctor didn't stay. It's not that I feel like well I'm not a man if I cry. But I just don't dig another man seeing me cry, especially a Soul Brother.

May the sixteenth

I stayed up all night composing the letter to Melanie in my head. I fell asleep for a moment and had a very quick dream that I was in my mother's womb again and she was growing fatter and fatter and just swelling up so much that she exploded and died and I was pushed out into space where I melted into the black sky and drowned. I wrote the letter to Melanie twice and then I copied it onto hospital stationery that the orderly brought me. I'll copy it over into you now, Journal, so I can remember what I wrote.

Dear Melanie,

What you need is Freedom. Your poem Visions cries out for Freedom. You must become your own master.

I love only God. I must dedicate my life to my People. God has forbidden me to marry you. The angel's trumpet calls: "Daniel" — and I must harken to its call.

Good-bye Melanie
Je t'ai aimé,
Daniel

I gave the letter to Michelle when she came this afternoon. It was raining so we didn't go out for a walk. I didn't feel like talking much so she just left after she took the letter. And oh yes. She said that Ma's swelling went down and that she's out of the hospital now. I told Michelle no that I didn't feel up to seeing Ma right now.

May the seventeenth

That psychologist came to see me and I was feeling too depressed to hate him, so I just answered his questions. I didn't even feel like talking about Benjamin Franklin so I just told him I'd forgotten about that stuff. Then he had me do all this arithmetic and tell him what it means to say "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." I said it means you don't tear another guy down when you have the same problem he does. Then he wanted to know about "One bird in the hand is better than two in a bush." I told him it's better to have like a girl for yourself than to admire two walking down the street. The psychologist just wrote this all down. Then he asked me if I was engaged. "No" I said, "Not anymore." Then he just walked away.

No one came to visit me today — not even the Doctor. Sometimes I wish Melanie and I could get together again.

May the eighteenth

Well, my Brother Journal. It turns out yesterday was my last time to write to you while I was in the Hospital. This morning after breakfast my Doctor came to see me and he shook my hand. "Brother," he said with all that old soul voice and handshake, "Brother. You are a free man." I looked at him. I couldn't take it in at first. Freedom! But my Doctor was still holding my hand — shaking it — and I knew it was time to be cool. So I just shook his hand back and said, "Thanks, Brother." Then I got packed and the orderly from Haiti went with me down and out to the gate. I shook his hand with soul too, and I walked all the way to town and took a bus home.

My father saw me and saw I was a changed man. He said Melanie had been over yesterday and had said to say good-bye. She also said that she was taking the plane home East that same morning. Then Sonny came in and gave me the soul shake. "She's gone.

You're a free man, Brother," he said. Ma just hugged me to her and sort of cried and whispered "my baby." I haven't seen Francine and Chico yet but I hear they're getting along real well. Seeing as how Dad accepted me back without a word, I knew right then there'd be no trouble with the rest of the family. *They* loved me all along anyway.

The only one that was strange was Michelle. She just stood back from the rest and didn't really greet me or anything. I knew how she felt about Melanie leaving and everything, so I went over to comfort her. But she wouldn't talk to me. She just gave me a letter and then walked away. Her being so distant really hurt my feelings.

The letter was lavender and I knew it was from Melanie. I went outside and got on my motorcycle and went on down to the marshes. I just sat there for awhile and looked up at the sky. It was grey, but not an ugly grey. It was sort of a pearly grey and the rushes made silent gold lines against the greyness. The marsh pond reflected the grey and the gold, and gave off a soft shine in the afternoon sun. Just sitting there for awhile made me feel all calm and at peace again, and the hurt from Michelle melted away. I love the marsh pond. I often think it is the forgotten sea-child of the Ocean. It is my spiritual home.

I feel beautiful again — Beautiful — like I did that time I was walking with Michelle in the Hospital garden and the blackness of our bodies gave off a warm glow in the sun. I feel more than ever now that God has called me and that I must dedicate my life to His service. I opened the letter. It was a poem on lavender stationery. —

*years of monotone emptiness
bread and fish
dry-boned tangerines
acres of sidewalks
echoes of
inconsequential conversation*

*one night of palms
thighs and ankles
accordion-spaces of black and grey
whispers of affection forced
out of focus*

Carole Kohanim

MATTER AND ENERGY

1956

I am coming home from school; I see myself with books, an old, wrinkled, soft paper bag that must have . . . my gym clothes in it, my soiled gym clothes . . . and a towel. . . . I am carrying the books and the bag and my purse up against my chest, so that my shoulders are a little hunched. Sharon is with me, she and I are talking. She laughs at something I am saying. I clown around. I imitate a teacher at school, Miss Strong, who is very thin and cries sometimes. . . . But the Fear is beginning: there it is. At the end of this block, and when we turn onto the next block . . . at the end of that block it will be waiting for me. It has a shimmering shape, no shape to it.

I am sick inside.

I am twelve years old on this afternoon. Sharon chatters with me. In front of our old house we are standing, two girls with books and things hugged up against our chests. We make faces. We roll our eyes. Behind me, inside the house, behind the pulled shades, the Fear is waiting.

"See you tomorrow," Sharon says.

She leaves me to it.

Inside the house, silence. The living room is too empty. Nothing is out of

place, nothing knocked over or torn up. . . . I stand in the doorway thinking, *What if somebody has broken in and has killed her, and now he's waiting for me with a knife?*

Nothing.

The living room empty. Kitchen empty. "Ma . . .?"

There are two of us now, since my father left. I call out, "Ma? Ma?" Yesterday she was in bed at this time. I go back to her room, "their" room . . . the bed isn't made. A smell of cigarettes, closed-in air. "Ma? Where are you?" The shower I took after gym class was too hot, then it was too cold. My body is filmed over with a fuzz of perspiration grown cold, terrified. I put my books down on the kitchen table. There is weeping in the air, but silent. Out in the back yard, nothing. The clothes line is empty.

The basement?

Down here the silence is heavier. The weeping heavier, but still silent. Dark air. "Ma, are you down here?" I am angry. There she is, squatting behind the furnace. No, she is sitting on something. "What are you doing? Why are you hiding?" I ask her. I can smell her sweat. She says nothing.

I can feel the weight in her, her body. She is panting. She hugs herself. She is making a funny noise — her teeth are chattering. "Why are you down here? Why are you down here hiding?" I scream.

1969

It is my job to outline precisely the lives of others. Here is Elizabeth A. Price. Coordinator of Urban Humanities League. Born, 1921, Philadelphia. Wellesley B.A., Michigan M.A. and Ph.D., Psychology. Married to Norman Price, lawyer. Active for fifteen years in Humanities League. Civil rights marches. Committees . . . city, state, federal. . . . Cover story, *Look*, 1967. . . . A big blossomy woman with rouged cheeks, very energetic. She sits waiting to be interviewed on our show. You can almost see the energy in her, in her plump upper arms and the tension of her throat! The star of the show is Vince Ellman, famous here in Detroit. He smokes quickly, helplessly, with his rogue's smile. A boy. A boyish boy of forty-five. We have ten seconds to go. Eight seconds. Vince is fooling around. Everyone in the studio laughs. Mrs. Price laughs. She is wearing a nondescript suit and her laughter booms out, ruddy and delighted.

We are on the air.

"This morning we have with us Mrs. Elizabeth Price, known to all of you for . . ." Vince begins. His voice is abrupt and smooth, a little sly. He is a handsome man and he wears his hair long, in the style of the day, with sideburns. Boyish and a little sinister, he smiles into one camera and then another, he reaches over to pat Mrs. Price's hand. . . .

Watching the monitor I go blank: I think of myself watching the monitor.

I am behind the cameras, out of sight.
I am sitting in a chair that is in a row
of chairs, clipboard on my lap, my mind
blank. . . .

Vince chats seriously with Mrs. Price.
The terror of Detroit! — the tragedy of
Detroit! — all put into words here this
morning on the Vince Ellman show, so
that people watching it can forget what
is behind the words. If it can be talked
about like this, a handsome man and a
motherly woman, chatting, smiling seriously,
if it can be televised and talked
about, it cannot be real and nothing
will happen. "It's certainly a pleasure to
meet someone with a positive outlook,"
Vince says, glancing significantly at the
television camera. I can feel his audience
nodding, grateful and pleased. Vince
smiles. To smile like that you must slit
the corners of your mouth carefully,
with a razor blade. When the bleeding
stops you will be able to smile, like
Vince.

1956

I am downtown alone, in a movie
house. I have run away for a day. My
head aches because I haven't eaten. I
have run away, I have slowed down, I
am sitting through a double feature,
picking at my nails. There is a sudden
impulse in me to lean forward and
knock my head against the seat in front
of me, I don't know why. . . . At home
my mother sits sometimes and hits her
head against the wall, gently. I think
she is trying to remember something.

She sits clumsily facing the wall, as close as she can get, and then leans forward and bumps her head. Between the two of us there is a certain space, a certain kind of air. We are mother and daughter. When she knocks her head against the wall something jumps in me, like a memory of my own, I don't know what it could be . . . there is a force inside me that wants to be let out, to get out of me, but I don't know what it is.

This movie is about soldiers. Technicolor. A strange force makes the men run around—they are shooting guns, they are jumping across ditches, they are writhing on the ground, dying, coming to life again shouting, they are not like my mother and me but I don't understand the difference between us—why are some of us bodies, sitting in the dark, and some of us running around, our arms and legs so energetic? But now something has happened: the sound track goes dead. The actors continue to move their mouths. Silly. A man in the audience giggles. I hate this silence. There is too much of it in the movie house. I am afraid the Fear will shape itself out of this silence.

1969

Vince leaning forward in the lovely fading light. Snow in heaps about us, cars passing slowly. . . . The sky is overcast, the sky is a few inches over our heads. Vince says, "What are you always thinking about? Why are you so

mysterious?" He teases me, he is a little annoyed by me. Doesn't he know there is a heaviness in me, a center of gravity deeper than his own? He takes my hand between his hands and rubs it, briskly, though we are out in public, on the sidewalk in front of Topinka's. "My little girl has cold hands!" he says, frankly and sweetly. He is like this on the show, often. It is his truest self. I fell in love with him, I think I fell in love with him, seeing him on the monitor that first day on the job. When I met him I saw only a man of moderate size, perky and talkative, with a strangely smooth, innocent, even bald face . . . when I saw him on the monitor my heart contracted, a face stark and handsome and in control, words coming from it with such magic. . . . "You are on an island and I'm coming to rescue you!" he says, joking and not joking.

1957

Three months of health! Aunt Thelma comes over all the time. Father tried to come over — she wouldn't see him. (He is drinking a lot, they say, he misses work all the time.) But still she is healthy, she is changed, she goes to the beauty parlor and has her hair done like all the other women at our church, a permanent wave; ugly. She smiles beneath the ugly hair. She makes breakfast and dinner for us, she makes real dinners, she goes out shopping by herself and for three months she is healthy.

. . . Then, one day, the shakes are upon her . . . I can feel the floor of our battered old house vibrate . . . I scream at her, "You're doing it on purpose! You hate me! You're doing it on purpose!" The spell begins. She lies in bed, dressed. Her fingernails are dirty. She is staring, her face is pasty and bulbous, something is straining to get out. She reminds me of a tree, a dumpy tree, lying capsized, chopped down. Her fingers could turn to twigs, they are so silent. She mutters to herself: "If that was all I had to do . . . bitches strutting down the street . . . I don't have to slave for them, I can tell them to go to hell. . . . I won't put up with his stinking. He comes over here, that bastard sets a foot in the door, I'll call the police and they can have him. . . . I don't have to put up with anything. . . ."

1969

The television studio has no shadowy corners, no smudges. Everything glares with light. I wake up at five every morning, I can't sleep. I think. I go to work. I carry up to the studio my papers, in a big leather purse. There is light everywhere up here, light in the corners, clarity. I make precise outlines of the lives of real people: Nicholas Bruno, Guitarist. Born Brooklyn, 1934. Recording on Capitol label. His latest release is. . . . Feature role in the new Paramount movie. . . . Vince takes the papers from me, reads them greedily, in a few seconds. I watch his eyes dart

along the lines. In those few seconds he takes over everything I have researched, he knows everything, he sits down to face his guest of the morning. Today a lively show? Controversy? Vince has a pleased, sinister smile, he will lead his guest into dangerous territory if he can. . . . The other day he got a Unitarian minister to state his disbelief in God . . . at least the minister seemed to be saying that . . . a hundred telephone calls followed, angry women, ready to fight! Vince lights one cigarette after another. I watch him on the monitor, lighting a cigarette. It is thought that television is unreal, that the people whose faces appear on it are actors, not real people, saying words that are rehearsed and not real. In houses people lean forward, trying to peer into the world of Vince Ellman, curious about the real Vince Ellman . . . but I am here a few yards from him and I prefer the image on the television screen: more vivid, more handsome, without distractions, winking intimately to the housewives and to me, only to me. . . . After lunch Vince takes me to lunch. He kisses my hand. He has a wife and four children, he looks younger than his wife, I love him and my heart pounds stupidly in his presence, I want to shake myself free of the fear that weighs my body down. But I can't. He says, "Where are you going now?" "To see my mother. It's Wednesday," I tell him. "You want me to drop you off?" he says. I tell him no, the hospital is too far away. No.

1958

Is that blood on the floor? Blood splotches on the wall, the bathroom door. . . ? She must be in the bathroom. I am standing in the hall. Silence. Waiting. Inertia. I feel her silence on the other side of the door, her body like my body inert, waiting. The silence grows heavier. Last night she came in late, out drinking, she slipped in the kitchen and said I'd spilled water on the floor, she scraped her knuckles somehow, she screamed at me. "You want me to die! You're always wanting me to die! Don't you know I can hear what you're thinking?" She threw the flour canister at me, it didn't hurt. It hit me in the chest and fell to the floor and broke, flour exploded everywhere, all over. . . . Now she is in the bathroom. I wait. In a few minutes I will open the door: there, in the tub. Her body. Heavy, collapsed, the breasts bluish-white and collapsed, her body a strange luminous color, all its energy gone and yet still alive, still alive. . . . Smears, streaks of blood. The knife on the floor. Oh, the ugliness of blood, its smell! The ugliness of a face that has no consciousness! I begin to scream. I scream at her to wake up. I am still screaming.

1969

Split-second timing, a magician's timing: my love! He clowns, he rolls his eyes, the camera turns upon him and he is "normal," he begins to speak. I lean forward entranced by his words.

He is not speaking of the silence of a house or of the sky at night . . . he is not speaking of the terror of empty spaces, parking lots, deserts, city libraries at closing time . . . the look of a knife in a kitchen drawer . . . flour that won't come out of a plaid skirt. . . . No, he is speaking of a furniture sale, a March sale . . . half-priced sofas, love seats, chairs, lamps, dinettes. . . . He knows exactly what he is saying, the words say themselves and are finished, nothing to worry about. I love this man but I am afraid of him. Inside myself I am sweating with fear, but outside myself I am a pretty young woman, always on time. A high school teacher told me, a spinster who gave advice to girls, *Your talent can be to always be dependable.* That is my talent.

1958

The ambulance arrives. She is carried out on a stretcher, not dead. So much blood! The bathroom door is closed. I mold my face out of my hands, still seeing her. Why did she do it? Why not my aunt, why not the woman next door? Why not my friend Sharon's mother? I am sick with hating, hating, hating. My aunt Thelma moves in now and I hate her, I want to go down behind the furnace and lie on the dirty floor, press myself against the floor, try to get through it. My mother used to lie on the floor, trying to get through. . . . She has a face someone has clawed at, her hair is wild, streaked with blood,

oh, her hands are the roots of trees torn out of the earth and she longs to get back into that dark, dark air and that silence. Though she is gone now, to the hospital, I can still see her. My aunt opens a can of beef noodle soup for me.

1969

Slumped over, a woman in a baggy blue dress. A regulation dress. My mother has a scattered, shrill, queenly face — her cheeks are flushed, without rouge — her eyes are sharp, very sharp. She stares at me rudely. She knows very well who I am but will not say hello, won't kiss me. I don't want her to kiss me anyway! What can I bring to this witch, what good is the bag of fruit, what good for her yellow complexion, her angry skin? "I'm the same, don't look for happy signs," she says, moving her mouth. Our eyes meet as if by accident. "Go away. Don't stare at me. You think I'm in a freak show?" she says. "I'll leave if you want me to," I say. "What did you come for?" she says. "Just to talk . . . to say hello. . . ." I say. "You're spying for them," she says listlessly. "No," I say. "They use you without your knowing it, you're so stupid," she says. "They can hear what you're thinking . . . you're too stupid to shut it off! You don't know how!"

Other women sit around us, yawning and blinking. Drugs keep them at the bottom of the ocean. My mother's eyes are feverish with the fight she makes against falling asleep, against surrender-

ing. If she surrenders something will happen to her, she thinks. . . . "They do things to the brain," she says. "They operate on it. First they stick a needle in you and press your knees down on the table and you fall asleep, then they do anything they want . . . they scoop out your insides . . . they pick around in your brain. I know." Sudden silence.

"Ma, you're looking much better . . ." I tell her. Gravity. Silence, Eternalness. The lounge is formica and plastic, a pleasant beige color, the other women are shapeless and contented, sleeping and smiling, probably all mothers. Here we sit, mother and daughter. We have come to rest. I fight the urge to lie down at my mother's feet and press my body against the floor, the linoleum floor, to make everything outside me stop moving. I am sweating inside. Globes of sweat form in my stomach.

1960

The second hospital. The third hospital. She stuffs herself and gets fat — her stomach swells. Her stomach then shrinks. Now I am sixteen years old and the house is sold. My father leaves for California. I sleep: I dream of the blood-splattered hallway, the door, the woman inside bleeding. In my sleep I follow the trail of blood-stains.

1969

In my sleep I follow the trail of blood-stains. It leads to my future! I

run along a hallway following those little starlike explosions of blood, I am being led into my life, into my future. . . . I grab at the doorknob and open the door. . . .

I rouse myself and on the monitor I see a "distinguished" Negro face. Judge Wright. He speaks fast, faster than Vince, he is smarter than Vince, he is even beginning to finish Vince's sentences for him . . . tension rises between them. . . . Vince has an ironic eye for the camera that Judge Wright can't see.

1963

The ornamental quality of the light: golden splotches. The half-drawn, cracked shades. His face, his shadowy eyes. We whisper to each other, "I love you. . . ." I hear myself saying these words clearly enough. Am I drugged? Am I like my mother in the home, drugged and heavy-lidden and lying? But my lover whispers these words and he is not drugged. Our bodies, wound together, are heavy and very warm. I love this boy. I don't love this boy. I am loved by him. . . ? I can't believe that I am loved by him, I am not loved, I am not even in this secret room, I am not even alive.

Lying here I imagine her lying on the floor somewhere, the way she lay on the basement floor. I press myself against this boy. His warm damp chest. His forehead. Warm, damp hair.

1969

Sunday. A sunny day. She is fatter, her cheeks fatter. A book on her lap. "What are you reading, Ma?" I ask, feeling happy. "It's just from the library . . . a silly book. . . ." she says, embarrassed. Now she is easily embarrassed by herself. She sits clumsily, her cheeks flushed.

1967

Hospitals. Six months out, eight months in. Fat, baggy stomach. Shrunk-en stomach. She stuffs herself with food, then she starves herself. . . . She screams at the nurses and at me, she sits in silence, in sorrow. A plump, fresh face. A haggard face. The months come and go, the pendulum swings back and forth, she is "making a new beginning," and now she is breaking out into a freezing sweat. . . . The years are all mixed up. My head spins with the years and months, mixed up, the real hallway and the hallway in my dream, the real blood and the blood in my dream. . . .

1969

The novel she is reading is *Glory of Dawn*. Her hands are plump and look healthy. I want suddenly to bump my head against hers, gently, trying to understand something, to remember something. There are secrets in her she must tell me someday. I want to ask her

Why did you go crazy? I want to ask her Why did you marry my father? I want to ask her Why don't you let me go? Inside her skull, with its patchy gray hair, are all these secrets. I want to bump my head against hers, seizing her, screaming into her.

Afterward I must see Dr. van Geel.

Dr. van Geel: Are you aware that she fears you? She says you threaten her.

How could I threaten her?

Dr. van Geel: In spite of her appearance, she is really very disturbed. We don't understand. She gets confused easily and claims to hear what people are thinking. . . .

Doesn't she hear me think of love? How loudly must I think of love? I am twenty-five years old, sitting in this hospital office, thinking of love and trembling.

Dr. van Geel: No, if you stop your visits she'll become depressed. You must continue seeing her. It's all she has to live for, really. . . . When she fights with the other women it's always about their daughters, you and the other woman's daughter, first they talk together in a very friendly way, then your mother starts to get excited, then the fighting begins. . . . Now, the first part of this week your mother was extremely well-behaved, she did her assigned work, she kept talking about you. She became very confused. She pressed her hands against her head and told us she was trying to get in contact with you, to find out if you were in danger. . . .

Once she tried to kill me, I won't forget that. Smashed crockery, flour everywhere in the kitchen, suffocating dry taste of death, white flour everywhere, everywhere, in my eyebrows in my mouth my lungs. . . .

Dr. van Geel: I wish we could figure out why she says you threaten her on these visits. You haven't any idea, yourself? You don't say anything to upset her? From Thursday till Sunday she becomes increasingly nervous, waiting for you, preparing for your visit . . . no, you must continue to see her . . . she would have nothing left, if you stopped.

1968

I am introduced to Vince Ellman. A brisk handshake. The television studio: lights, cameras, thick glass, rubber cords heavy on the floor. Jokes, banter. This man is a handsome man. It was rumored he was going to divorce his wife to marry someone, a young girl, whatever happened to her. . . ? The divorce apparently did not take place. He was "in love" with two women, his pals said. He fell out of love with them both.

I think about him constantly.

Sunday visit at the hospital: the flower pots, the other visitors, the ceramic saints, the fluorescent-red bows, the pay telephone booths, the smell of the lounge, the smell of permanent sickness. My mother's voice emerges out of the confusion. "I was very sick," she says. "Now I am getting well."

"Yes. You're looking wonderful."

"I'm awful ashamed of how I acted."

"Oh, Ma. . . ."

"What is it like at home? Is it all right?"

You know very well the house was sold.

"Everything is all right."

She stares at me. Silence.

"I am getting well," she says slowly. "I am going to leave here pretty soon. . . ."

Why do you tell such lies?

"On Easter, did I tell you, some real nice girls came in from a high school, to sing to us . . . they were about thirteen or fourteen, the cutest nicest girls. . . ."

And you loved them! You loved them, but when I was that age you tried to kill me!

"Then all this week I worked in the laundry . . . I worked real hard . . . I didn't do anything wrong, not once. . . ."

Yes, you tried to kill me. I won't forget that.

1969

Monroe W. Mason, Civil Liberties Union, degrees from Columbia and Harvard, lawyer, married, three children, tufts of sandy hair, perfect teeth, long nicotine-stained fingers. He and Vince are earnest, intense, interrupting each other. I watch them on the monitor. A man is a man: a woman falls in love with the idea of a man, but in

place of this man another might be put, a substitute. There is a space in the air that needs filling. A man steps in, to fill it. It is not Monroe E. Mason, the man on the right, whom I love. It is the man on the left I love, Vince Ellman. Watching them on the television screen, looking carefully from one to the other, I cannot judge them. I cannot say why it is that I love one man and not the other. I don't know either of them. There is nothing in their faces that is personal. There is nothing in anyone's face that is personal. What can you get from a face? Too many smiles wear out a face, that's true; but my mother, who almost never smiles, has a worn-out face. My own face feels worn, but not from smiling. I sit here while the minutes of the program flash by, second after second — time rushes when you are on the air — and I feel the old, dull, sickening trance begin in me, a crystallization of the Fear. Why? I will be sensible about this. The Fear did not exist, ever. It was a lie. Never behind the drawn blinds of a house on Dougal Street . . . never behind the bathroom door . . . never, never shaping itself in the darkness of the basement, never . . . all a lie, all of it. A sick woman, that is all. My mother, aged thirty-four, became sick, and off and on for years she was sick, she was well, she is sick, she is well. . . . Nothing else. There is no Fear, there was never any Fear, only sickness.

1969

"I want you to be married. I want you to be happy."

—That is my mother speaking. She speaks in a "logical," slightly singsong voice, as if imitating Dr. van Geel. He, being Dutch (I think), speaks in a very logical singsong voice, as if always speaking to children.

Confused, I nod at my mother. I agree.

She is telling me what to do with my life. I feel the contraction of her muscles seeking to expel me from her, forever. She wants to squeeze my head down out of her body—she wants me to leave her, to be born, to walk out of the hospital lounge, to wrap my arms and legs around a man, a stranger. I begin to cry. Oh, she is hateful, she wants me dead! The secret of mothers and daughters: that daughters should be "married," that they should be "happy." Just what does that mean?

"Why are you crying?" she says, alarmed.

She is embarrassed. What if one of the other patients sees us? (They are all spying on us. They know.) What if one of the nurses hurries over and seizes me, claims that I am just as crazy as my mother. . . ? My mother wants it all for herself. She wants to be sick, herself, but she won't let me be sick. She wants me to walk out of here. A woman in a blue dress, her feet in ugly support shoes, she is safe in her fifteen-year sickness and she is too selfish to share it with anyone else.

*Why do you lie to them about me?
You tell them I threaten you!*

"Why are you crying?" she says.

"I thought you could read people's thoughts? If you could read them you'd know," I tell her flatly.

This is the day Mrs. Price was on the show. Watching her and Vince that morning, I felt a terrible pang of sorrow, or desire . . . the two of them, a man I loved and a woman who might have been my mother, two people I might have loved, on that small screen . . . talking earnestly about the "children" of the slums. Who are these children? Why are they more valuable than we other children, who are living alone, grown up, whose heads ring with the terrors of childhood?

"I can't read thoughts. That was part of my sickness," my mother says carefully. They have taught her to say this. I smile, to show that I see through it all — her lies. Of course she can read my thoughts! Mothers can read their daughters' thoughts, as if listening in on a telephone line, but they don't want to admit it. She tells lies.

"I was sick then . . . when I said that," she explains.

I say nothing. Let her keep hearing her own lying words, echoing in our heads. Lies. She tells lies. Let her keep hearing them. We can sit here together for the next ten years, staring at each other, both knowing the truth. This will never come to an end! There is no way out for us, we must sit here forever! We are two bodies, weighed

down, and inside us our spirits have died, nothing is left but our two bodies and everything they remember.

"Yes, I want you to get married. It's time," she says. "I want you to be married and happy."

"You were married and you weren't happy," I tell her.

"We're talking about you and not about me," she says.

"It's the same thing," I tell her.

1969

At last the seconds run out — the show is over. Smiles. Congratulations. Monroe Mason shakes hands with Vince. He shakes hands with me. In a man's handshake there is a certain pressure, a question, which a woman senses but does not acknowledge, if the space in her that needs love is filled. I do not acknowledge this pressure. Vince is on the telephone, I go to the women's lounge, I wonder if I should leave the studio without saying goodbye to him. . . . Too much chatter up here. The restraint of being on the air, of extreme tension, makes everyone chatter afterward. Words. We caress each other, we fight each other, with words. In the years of my mother's silence I think I became mute, because she could not hear me. My words went nowhere. I had no secrets left, I owned nothing — what did I have in my life that was my own? Even the Fear became public. I told my girl friends about it, I joked about it, I laughed at myself. The Fear.

Inside me, where the Fear once was, there is nothing — a scooped-out womb.

Vince catches up with me and helps me on with my coat. My heart pounds at his nearness. I am afraid of him. I really don't want him. While he chatters I think of my mother in the hospital . . . I want to see her this evening, I want to make her confess . . . confess something. . . . I don't want love from this man! I want love from her. I don't know why women love men. What is there about their grins, their sweat, their big hands, that women must love? and must lie down to love? Years ago I had a lover, a boy, and what passed between us was like a movie I had seen years ago, nothing more. I know he was my lover. I remember his room, the sunlight through the cracked shades . . . it must have happened . . . I remember his face, even. But it is no more real to me than a story in a movie. It is less real, because the movie could be seen again, sharply remembered upon a second viewing, but the act of love is gone forever and cannot be remembered.

Vince walks with me to the elevator. Someday I will make a report on him for myself: Vincent Ellman, WWT-TV, television personality, born Waco, Texas, 1924, worked with twenty-two radio and/television stations in the United States, England and Canada, came to Detroit in 1963, married, four children, not quite my lover. What more can I find out about him? What is his interest in me? — is it my slightness, my pretty face, my turned-away face, my fear of

him? Is he interested in my stillness, Vince who is so busy with mouth and hands? I am twenty-five years old but I have not accumulated twenty-five years. . . . There is nothing in me. No years. My life is like a story being told by a camera, on a screen, with my face in the center, a story that keeps renewing itself in episodes, but which does not add up. There is no story-line, no progress. And the heroine does not get older. She never changes because, inside her, there is nothing — it has been scooped out to prepare her for a sickness of her own, yet even that sickness eludes her.

1969

I come to visit her, out of breath — the visiting hour on Wednesday evening — it is already seven-thirty! I am going to demand tonight that she tell me the truth. Earlier today Vince walked with me around the Fisher Center, around the parking lots, past the General Motors Building and the expensive restaurants, the two of us walking, him bent toward me to explain the world as he must explain it to people, again and again. Does he hate his wife now, because he has finished his explanation of the world to her? She knows everything about him. She is forty-three years old, a good-looking woman, no fool. But she knows all his jokes. She could finish his sentences for him, his mannerisms are as familiar to her as her own . . . perhaps they are her own. She is al-

most old enough to be my mother, that woman! Her husband is attracted to something in me, some stillness. He took me to Topinka's for a drink. Some people from the studio were there. He is best in such settings, against a background of other, busy people, of tableclothes and silverware and drinks; at these times it hardly matters what he says. I stare at him, in love. "You are on an island. You live alone on an island," he says. "Do you want me to rescue you?"

I drive all the way out to the hospital, to see her, out of breath and angry. I am so angry! But I don't know why, exactly. My mother detaches herself from a small group, it's clear to me that she would rather talk with these other women, these crazy old women, than with me. My face shows this. I won't lie.

Neither of us speaks. It is she who is "sick" and she resents speaking first, I suppose. Finally he gives in. She says, "I didn't think you'd come here tonight. . . ."

My face is flushed with anger. A nurse is standing not far away, sent by Dr. van Geel to spy on us. Her uniform is too tight across the hips, the thighs — she is a sluttish woman in her forties. I wonder about the nurses. I wonder about the intimacy of nurses and their patients, all those hours, the dreary overcast days, the baths, the massages, the routine matters of these secret days in hospitals. . . .

My mother and I sit facing each

other, in silence. We will never be free of each other. She can stare at me all she wants and she will never make me leave. "I want to ask you something," I say, after a while, my voice low so that the nurse won't hear. My mother looks tired. At her age women look tired unless they smile, and it is too difficult to smile.

"What?" she says.

"When are you coming home?"

She stares at me.

We have no home.

"The doctor doesn't think I can leave yet . . . not right now. . . ."

"How long do you intend to stay here?"

She looks frightened. She will tell the doctor how her daughter frightens her, how I bring the noisy broken-up world in here, into her safety, and threaten her with it! She wants to lie in bed all day, I know her. She wants to chatter and gossip with those other women. She will do laundry work here, and wait on tables here, and slave away in the kitchen here, but when she had a "home" with me she wouldn't do anything, she hid down in the basement and cried. I could smell the panic on her, then. She didn't want to be my mother! Now she pretends to be my mother and she says to me, *You should get married, you should be happy.*

"You can't hide in here forever," I tell my mother. I am speaking quickly. "They won't let you stay, it's the law. Dr. van Geel told me himself."

The muscles in her face begin to clench.

"No, you want me to leave you alone, you want me to disappear," I tell her, whispering. I lean toward her. We are so close, my mother and I, that I can feel the gentle pores of my skin breathing as if in memory of her breathing, twenty-five years ago, inside her body, the seeping of her blood into me and out again, the two of us one body, the same matter. She knows this. I can hear her thinking it, but she will not admit it.

"You want me to disappear! You want me to leave you. . . . When you tried to kill me that time, when you did all those crazy things for years, did you think I would forget them? How can I forget them?"

A television set in a corner. Applause. Squeals.

"You're dirty and hateful," I whisper. Suddenly I remember all that blood. Blood on the floor, on the white tub, splashed onto the wall — the pig! "You sit there proud of working in the laundry, doing other people's filthy laundry, and you wouldn't do mine — you hid down in the filthy cellar crying down there! Didn't you? Didn't you? How can I forget that?"

My mother begins to cry. She covers her face with her hands.

The nurse comes over. "Is something wrong?" she asks me. I must look frightened, she feels sorry for me, she looks from my mother to me and back again. I take my mother's hands away

from her face. Yes, it is there, the ugliness the hate. The nurse and I stare at it.

"Ma, please don't. Please don't cry. I have to leave in a few minutes," I tell her.

"Would you like something? Some tea?" says the nurse, gently, to my mother.

1969

Spring. Vince drives me out to the country. Everything is rising, rising in sunlight, but I feel myself drawn downward. The Fear is somewhere outside me, waiting for me. Vince turns the radio on, switches stations restlessly, as he drives. And he talks. Chatter about news at the studio, about friends of his, anecdotes — he knows so many people! Once he was going to divorce his wife to marry some girl, whom I have never met, and now I think . . . I think he would divorce that same wife to marry me, but I can't concentrate upon this fact. While he talks my mind wanders. He talks, he talks, I make my face glow with health and youth and a certain kind of petite, sinister prettiness, and so he talks into me forever, trying to fill me up . . . but no one can fill me up. He knows about my mother. He is sympathetic. It makes me weak in his eyes, like a cripple, a handicapped child — I should be grateful for him, always, for his interest. That is why I appear to listen so carefully to him. I am almost young enough to be his daughter.

I am young enough to be his daughter. But his daughter does nothing but keep away from him, right now she is bumming around Europe and hasn't written or telephoned for weeks, she wants to be free of her parents, but I am obedient and stupid beside him in the car, listening. Yes, I think he would marry me. He sees in me no life of my own, no distractions. Women are always after him — beautiful women, actresses, models, the wives of his wealthy friends — but they are too healthy for him, too solid, their beauty is too sure of itself, they don't need him to fill them up. So he turns to me. I will never alarm him with my own life. I will never turn weeping to him, confessing the death inside me, the death of my childhood, the trail of splattered blood leading to my future. . . . I will say nothing about the constant silence. Nothing about the wall of craziness she hid behind. Always outside, out there in the world, is the other side of that wall and I will never get to it. I am trapped. I keep following the trail of bloodstains in my sleep or when I am awake, and I am trapped in that hallway, I can't escape. I really am dead, though I sit here listening to this man, smiling. But I will never tell him about it. I will tell him nothing.

And so nothing will change. Nothing is expected to change.

"What did the doctor say?" Vince asks.

"The usual thing."

"That you're accusing her. . . ?
Threatening her?"

"Yes. I don't want to talk about it."

Vince shakes his head. "Jesus, that must be tough on you. Why should she turn against you? You visit her all the time, you bring her things . . . she should be grateful as hell. But I suppose that's part of her sickness, the things she says about you."

I accept this in silence. He is right.

Out in the country we go for a walk. The earth is spongy. My body is drawn downward. I want to press myself against the earth, straining against it, to get everything silent again, truly silent. I understand why the earth absorbs our bodies when we die. It is our bodies straining downward, suffocating the earth, wanting to get back inside it. Should I like down here? Should I press my face against the earth, claw at the earth, scream into it? . . . Vince embraces me lightly. I am frightened of him but I don't move away. Today? This afternoon? I will give in to him, I will love him? He kisses me and I don't step away, though I feel panic. I feel myself small and rather sinister, rat-like, very sly, very graceful in this man's arms. If I lie on the ground and allow him to love me, then. . . .

Not today.

We walk together. The Fear withdraws. Vince is boyish, very cheerful. In his heart he feels certain of me, for I am like a daughter, emptied of everything except obedience; you can tell that

by my face. My hair is long, to my shoulders, sleek and brown and obedient. My eyes are brown and obedient. He does not love me but he loves his reflection in me, as if I were a screen in which he could view himself endlessly, admire himself, his words, his language, the magic of his manliness, his immortality. He loves me. And yet, as he talks, I am thinking of the school books and the bag of gym clothes and my purse held up against my chest, I am thinking of the walk home from school, the front steps, the advertisements stuck in the mailbox, the silence of the house . . . I am thinking of the trail of bloodstains. . . . Vince bends to pick a wood. It has little green buds where flowers would have been. The buds are very small, not even green; they are white. They are bloodless, tiny, tight, turned in upon themselves as if in an agony of dreaming. Vince makes a bow, he presents me with the "flower." "Do you love me a little?" he says, as a joke. I take the flower from him. It is not a flower, and it will never be a flower, now. "Yes. I think so," I tell him.

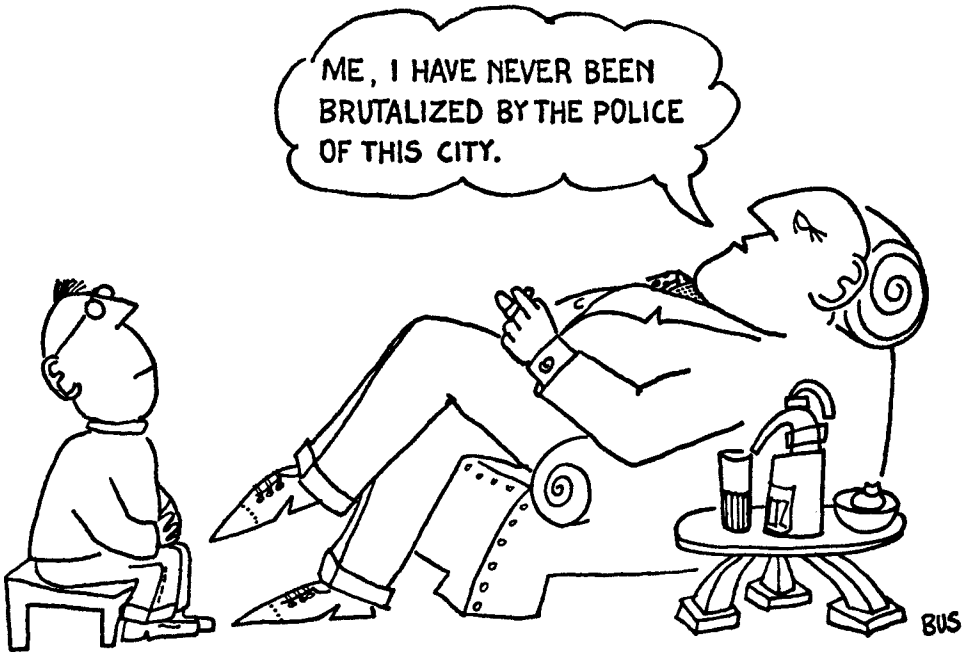
He seems satisfied.

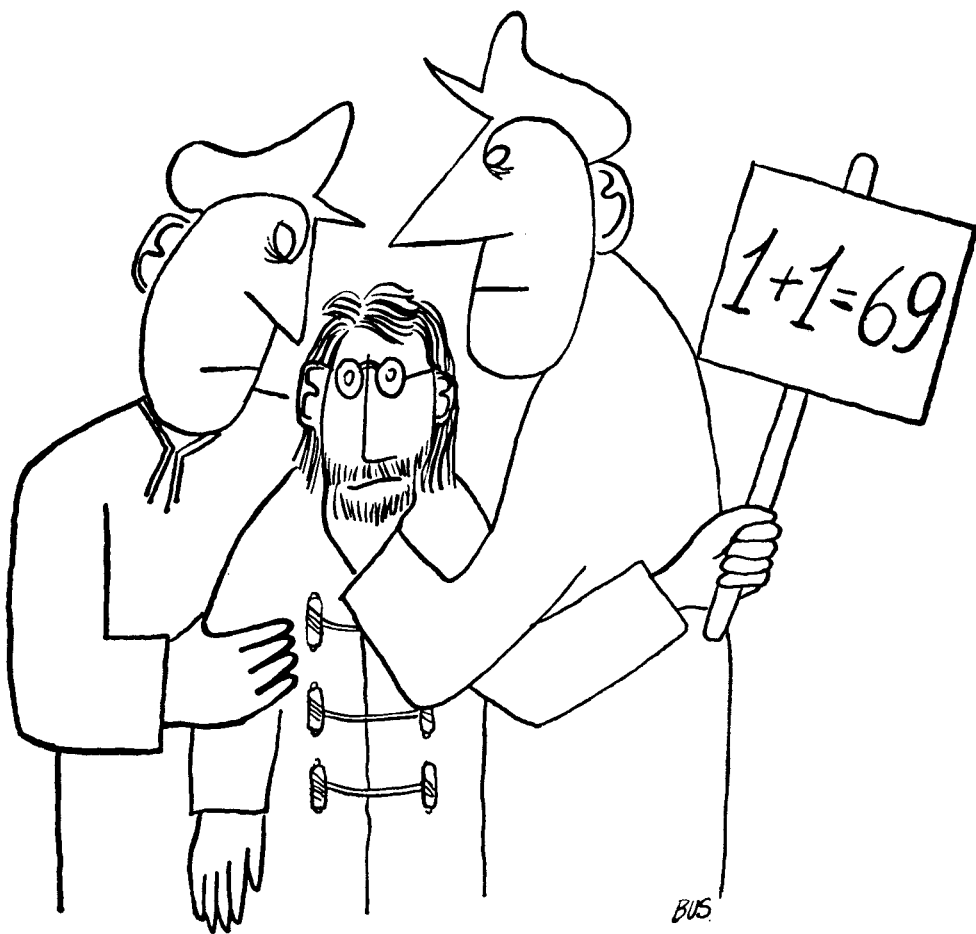
Joyce Carol Oates

PICTURES FROM AN INSTITUTION

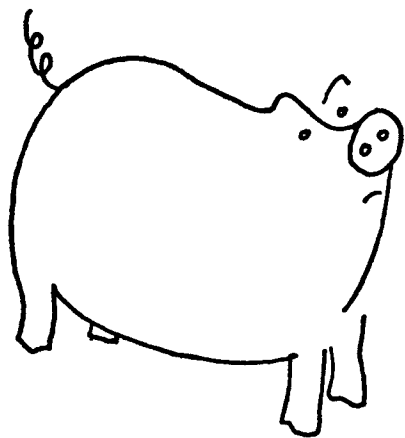


BUS





"DON'T GET WISE
WITH ME, OR I'LL
SPLIT YOUR SKULL
WIDE OPEN !"



BVS

THE TRUSTY CLERK.



BUS

THROUGH A LOOKING GLASS

THE WHITE WHALE

That prosaic image of one's life as a Ship on the Open Sea becomes more painfully poetic as one matures, as one's focus is sharpened and as it becomes clearer that the surrounding landscape is actually floating debris, that there has actually been a shipwreck, and that one is actually still afloat; painful, because such a moment of clarity must inevitably force to the surface of one's mind the most excruciating evaluation of that very survival. To survive anything is to question and ultimately understand what it is one has survived, and why. Such an examination may reveal the frightful truth that one has not, in fact, survived, but has rather really drowned.

In *Moby Dick*, Ishmael's understanding and questioning of his "survival" is so conspicuously absent that one is tempted to conclude that it was he, and not Ahab, who went down with the white whale. His attempt to explain his part in that notorious incident ("I cannot tell why exactly that those stage managers, the Fates . . .") is so vacuous as to be soporific, and it is with pleasure that one dons his angry-biting satirist-persona: oh, man, stop the literary bullshit; because *we* know why you survived, you survived because you were white; because you didn't pay your dues, survived because physically you were not even on the ship, you survived because when Queequeg, Tashtego and Daggo, those niggers, were actually in there dealing with that whale, actually *risking* their lives, actually *using* their *bodies*, while they were actually involved, your disembodied intelligence, your white ghost, as it were, was off somewhere contemplating, in a moment of crises, the significance of Plato and Aristotle, you survived because you never invested any soul, survived because you were never really vulnerable hence never really alive,

yes, you survived like a piece of driftwood survives (good image), survived because you planned it that way, and if you didn't plan it, how is it that although it is Queequeg — that strange nigger from the South Seas — who actually executed the idea of a coffin — lifesaver, it is you, the white boy, who survives on it? Do you think we are stupid enough to believe that if Queequeg had anything to do with the master plans he'd have let you survive on *his* lifesaver? And furthermore, we are hip to your weird game — we *know* that the white whale, that heinous symbol of the gray world, which "dark Ahab" and his "mongrel crew" (i.e., the Third World, dig that) detested so is none other than you, Ishmael — the white, disembodied, overliterate, boring, snobbish, insipid, jew-bastard, nigger-lover, effete, mediocre, assistant-professor-type, liberal. But, really, what can we do????

The tone is a bit rough, but there is, I believe, some truth in this. For example, there is the question of Ishmael's noninvolvement in the actual experiences of the voyage. There are pages and pages of description of physical labor in this novel, physical labor that was necessary on the whale ship, but in none of this labor do we find Ishmael — despite the fact that he goes to length to inform us that when he goes to sea, it is not as a passenger but as a "sailor." In the descriptions of those fantastic harpooning scenes, it is impossible to determine from what vantage point Ishmael is viewing the action; it is as though he is everywhere at once, and consequently one never has a visual image of where he is in the action — if, in deed, he is in at all. One keeps wondering, as he reads those scenes, did he lower with the boats? Is he in Ahab's boat? Starbuck's? Or did he remain on the ship? And even when the white whale destroys both the boats and the *Pequod*, it is impossible to determine where Ishmael is really at.

Part of the aesthetic beauty of the book is that while it carries a maximum of symbolic overtones, it is still simply a story of a whaling voyage; Melville was careful to keep the novel literal; and the precise reason for this literal weight was to prevent, according to Melville, critics from "scouting at Moby Dick as a monstrous fable, or still worse and more detestable, a hideous intolerable allegory." And yet, it is in Melville's failure to tie down Ishmael's whereabouts when the ship went down to some literal statement (like, "I, Ishmael owe my survival to the facetious fact that when the

white whale struck, I had gone downstairs to take a piss," etc.) that makes Ishmael's "escape" a "hideous intolerable allegory."

The offhanded way in which Melville accounts for Ishmael's survival is the source of a real, however slight, anxiety; and this anxiety carries the overtones of guilt, of moral cowardice. The account is so abstract, so allegorical ("And I only am escaped alone to tell thee — Job"), so slight (as to be phony) that one suspects Ishmael of not telling all that really went down. How much of his "soul" did his survival cost him? Did he really survive or did he just cop out?

To begin with, there is no apparent moral justification in the book for Ishmael's survival. One cannot believe that it was his "liberal" attitude towards the nigger-savage Queequeg that saved him — can he? I mean, Melville was heavier than that, wasn't he?! At any rate, a man who is so favored by God — or whoever was in charge — such as Ishmael was, must first of all question the Why of his survival, or at least talk to somebody about it.

Psychologically, Ishmael must have felt like the one survivor in an automobile accident in which everyone else is killed; such an incident must bear so heavily upon the survivor as to make him wonder if it had not been better that he died too. But Ishmael tries to hide this psychological impact of the experience, or maybe he is not aware of it. Part of the anxiety one feels in rereading his opening monologue is due to the fact that Ishmael's reaction to the incident is mythic rather than psychological. The psychological guilt Ishmael will not admit to: he will not accept the responsibilities of his feelings as a single person, but only as a mythic figure. "Call me Ishmael" sounds more like a proposition, a myth, than it does a statement, a name; "Call me Ishmael" means call me anybody, for I am no one specific, I am all mankind.

But understand this: Ishmael is not all mankind; he is not, for example, Ahab. His suffering is not Ahab's suffering, anymore than the white liberal's suffering is the Black Man's. Ishmael's suffering results from his unwillingness (or inability) actually to become a part of Ahab's quest, from his unwillingness to take a part in the physical work: he would rather remain an "intellectual observer." And even when he watches other people dying (that's what "intellectual observers" do), Ishmael will not admit to his own personal

guilt, but will quickly pass it off to "mankind," and this is a measure of his moral character.

It was Albert Camus, and types like that, who perpetuated the philosophy of "existentialism," of which Ishmael is an example, and which is nothing more than an escape hatch for white-cracker-intellectuals ("yes, yes, I know we are slaughtering stupid-ass Arabs, but, but all mankind must suffer, not just me . . ."). And it is in this sense that Ishmael is the grandfather to modern existential heros (i.e., cultural heros, or rather, cultural outs for weak-mouth white intellectuals.) Ishmael is not, as the novel tries to imply, at all related to Job. Ishmael has none of the awareness of his predicament, none of the corporeality, none of the warmth, the profundity, honesty and beauty of Job, and I don't know why Melville tried to imply that he has, except maybe to throw us off track.

There is, as I have hinted, something in Ishmael that relates him to such modern heroes as Jean-Baptiste Clamence, in Camus' *The Fall*, that cold-blooded motherfucker whose moral cowardice is an example of the worst in white intellectuals. In fact, Ishmael's confession — and that's what the book is — has some of that urbane garrulity, which is only a coverup for lurking guilt, of Clamence's confession; and just as Ishmael is constantly going back to sea, back to the scene of the crime, so Clamence keeps revisiting in his mind the scene in which he refuses to risk his life to save some drowning girl: "O Young woman, throw yourself into the water again so that I may a second time have the chance of saving both of us."

Like the fisher king in *The Waste Land* Ishmael's death is indeed the "Death by water." The black depths will not have him, and so, like a ghost, he is compelled, to "take to the watery part of the world" in search, once again, of a proper funeral. The water that Ishmael takes to is not the fountain of life, but one "more oblivious than death." There is much which Ishmael would rather forget. When Ishmael sees the mere sign of death, his moral cowardice and guilt forces him back to the water, where he may forget: "Whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet. . . . I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball." Water, the river of forgetfulness, is his substitute for suicide.

Melville, I do not believe, intended for Ishmael to be a character,

in the sense that Ahab, for example, is a character. The "I" for Melville was a unifying device through which he connected the many facets of his own personality; hence the "I" is at once a mystic, actor, poet, zoologist, ingenue, sailor, seer, humorist, popular scholar and, above all, a superb conversationalist. Melville's use of the "I" is very close to Chaucer's handling of it in *The Parliament of Fowls*; the "I" is never defined as anything definite, so he can be or move anywhere without ever being accused of being "inconsistent." The "I" therefore has none of the definite limitations, which Ahab has, which are necessary to characterization. Ishmael, the "I," has no definite relationship, no real interaction, with members of the ship, the way plausible characters do. Now his relationship with Queequeg is not the reciprocal relation between two characters (notice: we seldom hear Queequeg speak in his own words); it is rather one man's guesses about what may be going on in another man. My point is this: the "I" of this book is really Melville's own attitudes and prejudices; if we find fault in the "I" we are finding fault in Melville himself and the age he represented, and we are not just reading into his work. The "I" in the novel is not a character, in the sense that he can be criticized by another character in the novel.

Ahab, for example, can never know Ishmael's guilt; Ahab and Ishmael, the two most important characters never meet. What would Ahab have thought of Ishmael, given Ishmael's amorphous personality? What would Ahab, for example, have thought of the fact that Ishmael survived and wrote a book about the survival? Would Ahab have thought Ishmael a moral coward? Would he have been impressed at Ishmael's knowledge of whales, or would he have just shrugged his shoulders and said it was too bookish? These are significant questions which the structure of the novel cannot explicitly answer. Ishmael is not "a character" whose prejudices and attitudes the novel can question.

It is only when we are able to criticize the "I," only when we are able to include him in the story as a "character" that we can answer the above questions. Ishmael would have repelled Ahab had the two met, for Ishmael is not only the "I" in this novel but also "The Eye," the universal eye, the omniscient eye ("I") who sees all. Ishmael is God, and the old man would have resented this. Ishmael is, as I have stated, not a person but a presence that

dominates the world of the novel; Ahab would have resented this; he even resented the sun because it had the power to see Moby Dick when he, with his human eye, could not. Ahab's gripe with the whale is precisely the fact that the whale is supernatural; the old man hated *everything* that was not human; and conversely he loved that which was human, that which was vulnerable. "Let me look into a human eye," he said to Starbuck, "it is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God." Moments before he offs the white whale, Ahab speaks: "I grow blind; hands! stretch out before me that I may yet grope my way. Is't night?" This is very heavy. The (human) eye goes out. Night comes, Blackness comes. This is blind Lear. This is Blackness. This is the Truth. For all of us who need to survive. "Dark Ahab" "disappears" with his pagan crew. But Ishmael's "eye" remains open, it cannot close, like a dead man's eye cannot close; Ishmael's "eye" is the eye of the omniscient, the glossy eye of the white whale. Ishmael is like that ancient mariner in Coleridge's poem "whose eye is bright." (Reread, for example, the last part of that poem and Ishmael's opening monologue; both Ishmael and the mariner are compelled to retell their tales, endlessly, and without sleep, without any moment of blackness.)

Ishmael is the Norman Mailer of the *Pequod*, and mad Ahab the LeRoi Jones and, dig this, James Baldwin is Pip. Wow! Ishmael dug on Queequeg because Queequeg, despite the fact of them tattoos and South Sea origins, was black and beautiful. That's why Ishmael wanted to go to bed with him. He dug on Queequeg because the dude was a real savage, but understand what Ishmael means by "savage." For Ishmael savagery is essentially an artistic thing; he speaks, for example, of "that fine old Dutch savage, Albrecht Dürer." But Queequeg is a *real* savage, an ever flowing source of savagery. And like white people today who fancy themselves a little black, so Ishmael speaks to his own "white sailor-savagery." And like white experts on Blackness are very outspoken, so is Ishmael: "No man can ever feel his own identity aright except his eyes be closed; as if darkness were indeed the proper element of our essences. . . ." He is even foresighted enough to look to Blackness for salvation: "I'll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy." Ishmael is right on time.

When Queequeg dives into the ocean and saves a man whom he

threatened to kill only moments before, Ishmael thinks: "Was there ever such unconsciousness?" There is something in Ishmael's attitude toward Queequeg that reminds one of that verbose and poorly written pamphlet, *The White Negro*.

In deed, Ishmael is the precursor of the modern white liberal-intellectual. It is, for example, Ishmael's own preoccupation with the whiteness of the whale that makes his own complexion so conspicuous. After he surmises what the whale meant to Ahab—he could never really know Ahab's mind—he devotes a special chapter to what the whale meant to him, the liberal: "What the white whale was to Ahab, has been hinted; what . . . he was to me, as yet remains unsaid. . . . It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me."

The really beautiful people in this book: are Ahab and his relationship to crazy Pip; Tashego, Queequeg and Daggo; Starbuck and Stubb are beautiful, and beautiful because they go down with Ahab. If there is any value in reading this book today, it is in understanding the very deep, the very black thing that drives Ahab. And it is in spite of Ishmael's literary allusions and intrusions that we get a portrait of Ahab, yet it is the characterization of the dying old man with bad dreams that makes the book great. When Ahab went down he went down beautiful because he went down fighting the very forces that killed him; in our minds he lives as a paragon of how to die—and live.

It is Ishmael's death that is so horrible, for he is dead without knowing it. The irony of his "survival" is that he is the only character who doesn't survive.

Who will survive America?

Few Americans

Very few Negroes

No crackers at all

.....

But the black man will survive America.

His survival will mean the death of America.

LEROI JONES

Ishmael was a cracker. Now, dig that.

Cecil M. Brown

NOTES ON A NEW SENSIBILITY

One task for our generation of critics is to define the sensibility which manifested itself during the late fifties and early sixties. We all recognize something new, but in the peculiar language game of literary criticism, our definitions become vague and even conflicting. At the moment it is difficult to comprehend precisely the meaning of terms like "new realism," "new novel," "antinovel," "death of the novel," "fabulators," "black humor," "counterfeiters," "the literature of silence," "of self-parody," "of law and order," etc.; yet we are on the right track. The writers of the last decade, Robbe-Grillet, Iris Murdoch, John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, to mention only those of direct concern here, have, among other things, provided literary critics with new perspectives on the old problem of what literature is and might be.

By delineating the differences between moderns and contemporaries I hope to contribute to our developing sense of those perspectives. Contemporary literature reacts against the literature we call modern, the literature represented in English by Yeats, Eliot and Joyce, in French by Proust, in German by Hesse. Contemporary writers are skeptical of modernist notions of metaphor as a species of suprarational truth that unifies paradoxical opposites and modernist conceptions of myth which make it a principle of order for art and of discipline for the subjective self.

My task here is the old one of discriminating between historical eras, an enterprise unfortunately requiring a discomfiting degree of simplification and reduction. Distinctions between individual authors and continuities between periods, all the discriminations one likes to keep in mind, must be sacrificed to the job of making distinctions between one group and another. Hopefully the distinctions will prove illuminating enough to justify the procedure.

I begin my historical task with a description of the modernist consensus on the nature of myth and metaphor, starting with T. S. Eliot's enunciation of the mythic principle in "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth." "In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a meth-

od which others must pursue after him. . . . It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a method first adumbrated by Mr. Yeats." In Yeats's adumbration, myth structured poems, but it was also a form of spiritual discipline indispensable to the understanding of the self, of history, of the self's place in history. With Eliot and Joyce, Yeats was suspicious of the flux of the subjective self and its ability to cope with the chaos of the contemporary world. If self-mastery were to be achieved and with it the mastery of history, the self had to determine which phase of the historical moon it was in, the phase of the psychological moon to which it properly belonged, and then find its true mask in the proper antithetical phase. "If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are and assume the second self," Yeats wrote in his autobiography, "we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves, though we may accept one from others. Active virtue as distinguished from passive acceptance of the present historical code is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask."

Myth then turns the problems of self and history into a cosmic drama in which the self finds its way through role playing. Eliot resolved the problem in similar fashion, but with a different myth. As man and poet he struggled to extinguish the personality so that he might become the assured spokesman, not of idiosyncratic perceptions but of an ever present salvational order. As craftsman he struggled to displace his own voice, first with those of various personae, then with voices representing the tradition and the "Mind of Europe," and finally with the voices of imaginary characters speaking to each other. The discipline of the poet was paralleled by the discipline of the personality; through spiritual asceticism the worldly self dies and the new self, aware of God's redemptive power, is born. "In becoming no one, I begin to live," says Lord Claverton in *The Elder Statesman*. In losing the temporal self, Eliot as man and poet tames the anarchy and futility of the contemporary and lives in the recurrent Christian drama.

Joyce too distrusted the chaotic uncertainties of self and history. Though the theory that the artist must remove himself from his creation and stand back coolly paring his nails is Stephen's, not his, Joyce nevertheless tried to become the spokesman of the uni-

versal unconscious, the voice of Everybody as it went through the cycle of all human days and nights. Stephen is Telemachus and Bloom, Ulysses, and though the literary mode and genre of such stories has changed, the central human experience has not. History repeats on both the personal and cosmic levels.

Myth, then, in modern theory works two ways. On one level it provides "plot" structures. On another it becomes a mode of perception, even of vision, which provides the unstable subjective self with a world order that transcends individuality. Though the myths of Eliot, Joyce and Yeats are different, each functions to get the writer beyond himself, by turning history into a drama which is incorporated into the self. Myth expands consciousness allowing it to include the drama of the world. In this sense myth is a perceptual device for including the other within the self; but for the process to work the individual personality must discipline itself by playing roles, by becoming other than self.

This dramatic mythologizing of self and history was obviously antirational and involved new notions of the nature and role of metaphor. According to the modernist consensus, the world could not be interpreted from the empirical and rationalist bias of naïve realism which denied the validity of the dramatic and mythic. For Eliot and his critical followers, metaphor was modeled on the Incarnation, on the notion of the presence of the eternal man in the concrete object and the present moment. Similarly Yeats saw metaphor as a way of getting at the spiritual world of "moods" and "essences." To most moderns, the world was a vast buzzing confusion, an array of disconnected particulars, "an extraneous object, full of other extraneous objects" (as Wallace Stevens put it), and only the poetic imagination using metaphor could supply the world with order and meaning. For example, both Cleanth Brooks and I. A. Richards, for all their disagreements, saw metaphor as a way of reconciling opposites. Experience was full of paradoxes and contingencies which the great poet ordered through metaphor. In most versions of these theories, metaphor created a truth different from that of rational and empirical methodology and language. As Hart Crane wrote to Harriet Monroe, "the *rationale* of metaphor belongs to another order of experience than science." This rationale was, in R. P. Blackmur's phrase, a kind of "reason in madness," a way of

revealing situations which neither common sense nor science could even perceive. Metaphor revealed a kind of truth which was beyond the bounds of ordinary language and experience. Consequently, the language of poetry was, as Herbert Read never tired of arguing, essentially different from both ordinary language and prose. Prose was for explanation, for delineation, for didactic purposes, while metaphorical poetry was the language of unified truth. In Ransom's language, prose gave us the world's skeleton, poetry the world's body.

This rough sketch of modernist theory is less than complete, but it defines the aspects of modernism rejected by our contemporaries. By turning now to the theoretical statements of English Iris Murdoch, French Alain Robbe-Grillet and American John Barth and Thomas Pynchon, the nature of that rejection can be made specific. Since my aim is the definition of theoretical differences between moderns and contemporaries, I will treat only the essays of Murdoch and Robbe-Grillet and only the ideological features of Barth's *The End of the Road* and Pynchon's *V*.

Iris Murdoch's objections to dramatic myth and unifying metaphor are as familiar as Robbe-Grillet's. Both attack specifically, as does John Barth, the existential notion of myth and the totalitarian implications of such myth as it effects human choice-making. Murdoch in "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited" reviews the philosophy of art and ethics from Kant through Hegel and Kierkegaard to Sartre and Wittgenstein, and finds that all present an image of man as an individual alone in the universe making choices against an apocalyptic background. This man has no confidence in either reason or his subjective life, yet he is forced to choose between people, ideologies and courses of action that demand total commitment. To this man the only thing that matters is his own consciousness; the world, its objects and people have no reality as separate, contingent beings, but exist only as symbols in his internal drama.

Though Robbe-Grillet does not trace the philosophic development of the process that leads to this kind of man, he makes the same point. In the existential fictions of Sartre and Camus the world of nature, of objects, of other people was always appropriated to the subjectivity of the hero and the author. The writers of the past did not accept the difference and distance between the subject and the Other, so they continually tried through metaphor to overcome dis-

continuities, to suggest through a reconciling metaphor a link between things. The process of metaphor involved them in the creation of a supramundane link between different things. They used words not to present a thing, but a totality to which the thing belonged; they tried to find some inner meaning or transcendental significance for objects and people, a process that could only be accomplished by incorporating the Contingent and the Other as symbols within one's own consciousness.

Poets then projected their inner drama into works of art. Ralph Freedman, in *The Lyrical Novel*, describes the kind of artistic process which Murdoch and Robbe-Grillet reject. The artist represents himself as an object and transmutes that object into a visible work of art. "The perceived object becomes part of the poet's experience while rendering his private sensibility public, but, mirroring the poet's inner state, it loses its separate, independent character. In this way perceived objects become manifestations of the poet's spirit — features of his self portrait — as they are portrayed symbolically in the form of art." This kind of art work then relies on the technique of mirroring and doubling. Since the self, Freedman continues "is the point at which inner and outer worlds are joined, the hero's mental picture reflects the universe of sensible encounters as an image, the world is part of the hero's inner world." Just as the outer world becomes the hero's inner world, so the work becomes a projection of the artist's subjectivity. The artist by projecting himself into his work of art, makes himself a total universe.

Murdoch uses the label Totalitarian Man to describe such characters and writers. In these men, the self is "locked in struggle with the self" and others are significant only in as much as they can play a role in an internal drama; any center of existence other than self is either ignored or considered as menacing. Totalitarian Man rules out of existence everything which cannot be given symbolic significance in his consciousness. Though he may reach ever more inclusive symbolic structures, he can never encounter a reality which is significant simply in being other than himself. In fact, he can never be content with his own nature, he can never allow himself merely to be an individual experiencing other individuals; he thus becomes "a clear-cut piece of drama," a work of art, rather than a living man.

As a consequence Totalitarian Man erects, for both life and art, a false value system. The work of art becomes, Murdoch says, "the analogue of the lonely self-contained individual purged of contingency." The ideal in life and art is not to mean, but to be, and to be as a uniquely self-contained piece of drama. A good poem and a good person, according to this value system (perhaps most clearly expressed by I. A. Richards), have the capacity to organize ambiguities and paradoxes into a totality. Such procedure eliminates, Murdoch argues, both contingency and otherness. In fiction this system implies that characters are not free personalities separate from the author, but only projections of his conflicts. The modernist view may lead us to create "a fantasy world of our own into which we try to draw things from the outside, not grasping their reality and independence, making them into dream objects of our own." Such art Murdoch believes to be not the product of imagination but of fantasy; the truly imaginative consists in the recognition of the distance between self and other, of the unreconcilable nature of the other: "Real people are destructive of myth; contingency is destructive of fantasy and opens the way for imagination."

Murdoch here comes close to the mood if not the program of Robbe-Grillet. His sweeping attack on metaphor is based in part on the perception that metaphor overcomes differences, contingencies and opposites, and creates the illusion that all things are part of one system. All too often metaphor implies the existence of an anthropomorphic or at least anthropopathic "heart of the world." Metaphor extended becomes a myth or a metaphysical system that binds man to a continued and painful misapprehension of the world. Knowing that things are indifferent to him, knowing that he can never arrive at true correspondences, the poet nevertheless attempts to give this world of disconnected particulars, this extraneous object, full of other extraneous objects a symbolic unity. Such attempts are doomed to failure; to continue to try to "recover the distance which exists between man and things" is to turn human experience into a perpetual failure, for self cannot be reconciled with indifferent things.

Therefore Robbe-Grillet rejects the novel of doubling and mirroring, the novel of ambiguity, the judgment that a "book will be true in proportion to its contradictions." Rather, to write a good novel or to be a good person is to place oneself before contingent

reality, "to simply confront things." "It is no longer a matter of appropriating them to oneself, of projecting anything into them but of measuring the distance between self and things—without regret, without hatred, without despair . . .," without incorporating them into a metaphorical or mythic unity.

Consequently, both Murdoch and Robbe-Grillet reject the special position the moderns awarded to poetic language. "T. S. Eliot and Jean-Paul Sartre, dissimilar enough as thinkers, both tend to undervalue prose and deny it any imaginative function," Murdoch says in "Against Dryness." Prose for Sartre and Eliot is only for explanation and exposition; it is essentially didactic and informative and therefore cannot occupy the same realm as poetry. Robbe-Grillet of course turns this notion of prose into a virtue, for it can accurately measure and describe. Murdoch, however, does not share Robbe-Grillet's enthusiasm for empirical prose as a style for fiction. Instead she talks, rather vaguely, of restoring prose to its true imaginative eloquence. She apparently wants to develop a prose style which resists the prose-poetry dichotomy, and, were this an essay on her novels, her experiments in such a style might occupy our attention. Here one need only point out that both she and Robbe-Grillet reject the modernist hierarchy of values which exalts poetic language.

Murdoch and Robbe-Grillet further share an animus against encompassing structures; they find contingency and otherness liberating, find freedom in alienation. They are suspicious of the attempt to capture the whole in any description of reality; in fact all such descriptions are dangerously and misleadingly false. "There is," Murdoch says, "no prefabricated harmony, no social totality, within which we can come to comprehend differences as placed and reconciled. We have only a segment of the circle . . .," and to try for the whole circle is to falsify human experience. Similarly, Robbe-Grillet attacks the "Academic criticism of East and West" because it assumes that "reality is already entirely constituted." Like Murdoch, he thinks that even if reality were so constituted, the human mind and its language tools could never encompass it. Their protest is not against all metaphoric usages, but primarily those which imply a construction of reality that is finished, knowable, total. Often, criticism of Robbe-Grillet assumes that he rejects all metaphor and myth. But actually he recognizes that metaphors and fictions are

important, even essential ways of understanding reality; like Murdoch he opposes the tendency of metaphor and myth to imply transcendental or complete or closed or subjective systems of reality. For all their national and philosophic differences, then — Murdoch rooted in British empirical liberalism tinged with romanticism and Robbe-Grillet in phenomenology, existentialism and structuralism — both writers believe that fiction must avoid total metaphoric and mythic constructions, the techniques of mirroring and doubling, the values of ambiguity and paradox. Both believe that prose is a viable instrument of the imagination, though their conception of the proper language of prose is very different indeed. Both strive, by different techniques and structures to create a literature which describes contingency, otherness, the distance and difference between self and the other, a literature which is rigorously aware of its limitations.

Though John Barth and Thomas Pynchon have produced no body of theoretical writing comparable to Murdoch or Robbe-Grillet's, their work makes remarkably similar points. Barth's *The End of the Road* is the end of the road for myth and metaphor as the moderns understood it. The book is an ideological farce and the most farcical of ideologies is Mythotherapy, the doctrine propounded by that "superpragmatist," the unnamed doctor. Mythotherapy is Barth's version of the complex bundle of ideologies which Murdoch attributes to Totalitarian Man and which Robbe-Grillet attributes to existentialism. In the Progress and Advice Room of his Remobilization Farm, the doctor, an existentialist with American energy, explains the most powerful of his "string of implausible therapies." He begins with the modern commonplace that existence preceeds essence and proceeds to spin out, like Totalitarian Man, the theory that life is a drama in which we are the heroes of our own stories about ourselves. If we are to be successful, the doctor says — apparently having read Yeats as well as Sartre — we must learn to assign ourselves different roles, to wear different masks and to assign other people roles in our drama. "This kind of role-assigning is myth-making and when it is done consciously or unconsciously . . . it becomes Mythotherapy." Like all modern metaphor creators and myth-makers, he urges his patient Horner to assign others a role in the mythic drama of his own life, thus overcoming the sense of otherness and contingency which separates him from the world.

The plot of Barth's ideological farce reveals the weakness of myth and Mythotherapy. The self and the selves of others are too complex, finally too mysterious, to allow for simple mask-wearing and role-assignment. "The more one learns about a given person," Horner says, "the more difficult it becomes to assign a character to him that will allow one to deal with him effectively in an emotional situation. Mythotherapy, in short, becomes increasingly harder to apply, because one is compelled to recognize the inadequacy of any role one assigns. . . . As soon as one knows a person well enough to hold contradictory opinions about him, Mythotherapy goes out the window. . . ."

Out the window with Mythotherapy goes symbolic form as a useful way of interpreting life and art. Horner at one point is tempted "to dramatize the situation as part of a romantic contest between symbols." "Joe was The Reason or Being . . . ; I was the Unreason, or Not-Being; and the two of us were fighting without quarter for the possession of Rennie, like God and Satan for the soul of man. This pretty ontological Manichaeism would certainly stand no close examination, but it had the triple virtue of excusing me from having to assign Rennie any essence more specific than The Human Personality, further of allowing me to fornicate with her with a certain Mephistophelean relish, and finally of making it possible for me not to question my motives. . . ." The concern here, as in Murdoch, is ethical; if one turns life into a symbolic drama, one not only deprives it of its specificity, its concreteness, but one also eliminates one's sense of responsibility to others.

Another mistake of Mythotherapy lies in its use of the technique of doubling. To overcome his sense of inadequacy with the doctor, Horner takes on the manner of Joe Morgan, adopting his mode of argument, his stance in the world, even going so far as to treat Rennie as Joe does. But the doctor points up the weakness of this kind of role playing. To safely take over the character of another as part of one's internal dialectic, one must have an already stable self, which neither Horner nor the protagonists of most existential novels have. And then too, as the doctor indicates, "you couldn't act like him when you're in his company, could you?" The process of doubling, of incorporation and projection, so central to the dramatic myths of existential novels, to the poetry of Yeats and Eliot, simply

ignores the reality of the other person, of his reaction to meeting an imitator.

Barth's satiric view of Mythotherapy contains a criticism of the language theories upon which myth depends. The language of fiction is inevitably a falsification, but it must be a precise and accurately stated falsification, ironically aware of itself. The writer tries "to turn experience into speech — that is to classify, to categorize, to conceptualize, to grammarize, to syntactify it"; such transformation is "always a betrayal of experience, a falsification of it; but only so betrayed can it be dealt with at all." While the writer must be involved in myth since he has to translate experience into a "plot," his aim is to create "precise falsification," "adroit careful myth-making." Such myth-making differs from mythotherapy inasmuch as it seeks metaphors that reveal rather than overcome the dichotomies of contingent reality; it trims its assertions; it aims at the precise rather than the total, the conceptual and syntactical rather than the metaphorical; by honing his "mythoplastic razor" the writer can "have at reality."

The point is perhaps better made in a brilliant passage which at once diagnoses the new critics and the linguistic analysts. Both are "connoisseurs of paradox." "The connoisseur . . . requires of a paradox, if it is to elicit from him that faint smile which marks him for what he is, that it be more than a simple ambiguity resulting from the vagueness of certain terms in the language; it should, ideally, be a really arresting contradiction of concepts whose actual compatibility becomes perceptible only upon subtle reflection." One could not find a better one-sentence parodic-summary of Cleanth Brooks's notion of paradox, nor his thorough and patient efforts to find an overriding unity which reconciles oppositions. For Brooks a good poem has a "unifying attitude . . . which really unifies, not by ignoring but by taking into account the complexities and apparent contradictions of the situation concerned." Such a poem is significant because of "its character as drama," says Brooks in a statement characteristic of Murdoch's Totalitarian Man. Barth links such connoisseurship with the analytical belief that the source of most paradox is in the language. On the contrary, paradoxes are not only in the nature of language but in life itself; in the contradictory things people feel, say and do. Paradoxes arise not so much because of

something in the language, but from inability of language to point to the precise and particular human feeling. "Things can be signified by common nouns only if one ignores the differences between individual things and feelings." While sharing with Robbe-Grillet a sense of the necessity of precision, of the description of differences, Barth thinks that language can never precisely define these differences. Just as the writer cannot avoid making plots and myths if he is to tell his story, so he cannot avoid assigning names to feelings and attitudes. "Assigning names to things is like assigning roles to people"; nevertheless a writer of fiction must assign roles, he must name things: "it is a necessary distortion if one would get on with the plot. . . ." But where the connoisseur of paradox would value the myth-making by the extent of its dramatic ambiguity, Barth, with Murdoch and Robbe-Grillet, sees no innate value in deliberately building up a set of ambiguities to be reconciled by a unifying metaphor and myth; like Murdoch, he believes that such methods lead only to ethical and artistic irresponsibility. Horner finally learns that he must carry with him the picture of the bound, bloody and dead Rennie; no metaphor, no cosmic dramatic myth can diminish the ugly and brutal fact of her death and his responsibility for it. There is only "the raggedness . . . the incompleteness of it all."

Yet the honed mythoplastic razors of art, the precise falsification, the adroit and careful myth-making, the syntax, the grammar, the concepts, the categories of art, the plot, the role assignment of character provides an antidote to mythotherapy. Unlike Mythotherapy, unlike metaphor-building, such an art is aware of its artificiality, its incompleteness, its partial dumbness before reality. Mythotherapy tries to force the whole world into the self and the self into the world, to make everything in the world subordinate to the drama of the self; mythoplastic art turns ironically on itself, works to recognize the separate and mysterious difference between self and other, artifice and reality. Barth's satiric attack on Mythotherapy and his cautious hope for a mythoplastic art obviously links him with Murdoch and Robbe-Grillet.

Pynchon shares in the contemporary critique of modernism but it is difficult to abstract a theory from his loose and shaggy novel. He works through an ironic thematics, an ironic juxtaposition of fools and foolish theories, a technique which makes it difficult to

collect the kind of unambiguous quotes one needs to state a theory. Only through a kind of accumulation and repetition of ideas do we come to see the novel's *dianoia*. Like all ironic works, the total structure reveals more than any part. As in many modern satiric novels, all the characters are fools; but some fools, because they face in a slightly different direction than others, seem a little less foolish.

One such character, Fausto Majistral, a Maltese poet and man of letters, writes his memoirs and comes as close as anyone to revealing the aesthetic theory of the novel. He is specifically concerned with the problem of metaphor. "Living as he does, much of the time in a world of metaphor, the poet is always acutely conscious that metaphor has no value apart from its function; that it is a device, an artifice. So that while others may look on the laws of physics as legislation and God as a human form . . .," poets "are alone with the task of living in a universe of things which simply are, and cloaking that innate mindlessness with comfortable and pious metaphor so that the 'practical' half of humanity may continue in the Great Lie, confident that their machines, dwellings, streets and weather share the same human motives, personal traits and fits of contrariness as they." According to another character, metaphor, instead of humanizing an "innate mindlessness," translates the human into the inanimate, "foisting off the humanity that we have lost on inanimate objects and abstract theories." Where Robbe-Grillet sees in metaphor a tragic distortion of reality, Pynchon sees it transforming the human into the inanimate, and in *V*. "alignment with the inanimate is the mark of a Bad Guy." The metaphor-making poet is always in danger of becoming one of the supreme bad guys.

Pynchon, presumably in his own narrative voice, gives us a graphic demonstration of the process by which metaphor dehumanizes, by extending to a logical reduction the metaphor "that the act of love and the act of death are the same." "That single melody, banal and exasperating, of all romanticism since the Middle Ages," leads to the grotesque fetishism of both the affair between *V*. and the dancer Melanie, and the ballet, *The Rape of the Chinese Maidens*, in which Melanie performs. Summarizing the consequence of the death-love metaphor Pynchon writes: "Dead at last, they would become one with the inanimate universe and each other. Love play until then becomes an impersonation of the inanimate, a transvestism

not between the sexes, but between quick and dead; human and fetish." We watch V. in her love affair, and Porçèpic and Satin in their ballet, transform Meláne into an object. V. acts out love-making roles with the ornately costumed Meláne, while Porçèpic, through the same costumes, mechanizes her dancing. First of all she shares the stage with automata — "They're lovely creatures. . . . They move so gracefully. Not like machines at all." Meláne's hair is cut off and she wears a wig; she is garbed in a long sequined dress that restricts her movement; she wears, in roles with V. and in the ballet, innumerable combs, bracelets and beads. In short she turns more and more into an object; but the transformation has a grotesquely ironic conclusion. As Su Feng, she is supposed to be impaled on a pole at the end of the second act. To protect herself, she is to wear "a protective metal device, a species of chastity belt, into which the point of the pole fit [*sic*]." But, "adorned with so many combs, bracelets and sequins," she becomes confused "in this fetish world and neglected to add to herself the one inanimate object that would have saved her." The old metaphor of love and death leads first to the grotesquerie of modern love and modern art and then to the destruction of the human body.

Art, according to Fausto, should have precisely the opposite effect. Art is not a communication with either angels or the unconscious but "with the guts, genitals and five portals of sense." "Real art, real metaphor is not a mechanization of the body but an understanding of it. As examples of good and bad metaphor-making Fausto cites the behavior of adults and children on Malta during World War II. The adults construct an elaborate series of metaphors which turn the war into a struggle between the laws of God and man, between the defenders of the rock of motherhood and its demonic attackers. The children on the other hand "knew what was happening: knew that bombs killed." "But what's a human after all? No different from a church, obelisk, statue. Only one thing that matters: it is the bomb that wins. Their view of death was nonhuman. One wonders if our grown-up attitudes, hopelessly tangled as they were with love, social forms and metaphysics, worked any better. Certainly there was more common sense about the children's way." The children reject any notion that bomb deaths are part of some heroic struggle; they know simply that before the blast

of a bomb, the human body, like other bodies, disintegrates. Bombs destroy and that, like Rennie's death, is a fact not to be mythologized.

For Fausto the children's nonhuman view of death is closer to reality; the "nonhuman . . . was the most real state of affairs." The nonhuman in Pynchon differs from the inhuman and the inanimate. "The inhuman means bestiality (though beasts have at least the advantage of being animate)." Fausto here is close to Lawrence's Birkin, who never tired of pointing out the difference between the mechanical, the humanistic and the nonhuman. Yet neither Fausto nor Pynchon carries the argument as far as Lawrence or Birkin. Where Lawrence's preoccupations were emotive, sexual and biological, theirs are political and aesthetic. These two themes coalesce in Stencil's quest, which pointedly satirizes the mythic journeys in *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*. Stencil is one of the classic fools in literature; like Don Quixote and Dostoevsky's man from the underground, he models his life on the literary forms of the previous generation, turning the mythic and symbolic quest into a life-style. This "child of the twentieth century" tries to learn what happened to his father, what happened between his father and V. and the real identity of V. He adopts from the modern conventions of the mythic quest, the device of using different masks, which leads to what Pynchon calls "forcible dislocation of personality," an obvious thrust at Eliot's extinction of the personality. But where Murdoch would argue that such role-playing violates the separate existence of others, Pynchon demonstrates the violence this dramatic metaphor does to the self. For example, in his various roles Stencil wears "clothes that Stencil would not be caught dead in" and eats "foods that would have made Stencil gag." Such antics gain him nothing, for playing roles, Pynchon archly points out, is not the same thing "as seeing the other fellow's 'point of view'"; rather it is a device for trying to get what one wants. The Yeatsian dare to become the other theatrically leads only to self-violation without an expansion of sympathy for and insight into other human beings.

But even worse, around each of these identities Stencil weaves "a nacreous mass of inferences, poetic license and forcible dislocation of personality into a past he didn't remember and had no right in, save the right of imaginative anxiety or historical care, which is recognized by no one." "And all of this role-playing served to keep

Stencil in his place: that is, in the third person.” He cannot even say “I” and so becomes an object even to himself. The techniques of masks and dramatic voice lead not to greater awareness, but to a sharply divided self acting out a fantasy that makes the self more inanimate.

Of course Pynchon is aware that a writer must use something like a dislocation of personality if he is to write it all, but he has Fausto explain eloquently and forcibly the proper use of such devices, the proper awareness of their limitations. Like Horner in *The End of The Road*, Fausto requires a precise use of fictional devices, accompanied by a sense of their consequences and limitations. The convention of different selves is only a convenient artifice for describing changes in personality that take place in linear time; instead of postulating continuity of self, one simply gives different proper names to different configurations of self in time. But even with this device “we do sell our souls: paying them away to history in little installments.” But as long as we recognize the price of this fiction, it is worth it. “It isn’t so much to pay for eyes clear enough to see past the fiction of continuity, the fiction of cause and effect, the fiction of a humanized history endowed with ‘reason.’” In short, fiction for Fausto is a mythoplastic razor which reveals the nature of other fictions, of other metaphors. With his contemporaries Pynchon endorses a skeptical use of fiction.

But more specifically than any of the writers of his generation, Pynchon rejects the notion that myth can be used to order the chaos of history. Stencil is not alone in his attempt to force himself into a past “he didn’t remember and had no right in.” The book abounds with fools who want to read pattern into history. But, as we might surmise from Fausto’s list of historical fictions, the point of the book is to reveal the inadequacy of all metaphors of history, whether they be cycles, waves, spirals or still points. Pynchon makes this point best in those sections of the novel which deal directly with the espionage activities of Stencil’s father, Porpentine, Bongo-Shaftesbury and countless others. His immediate targets are of course the conspiracy theories of history which dominated the cold-war mentality, particularly during the McCarthyite fifties. Richard Poirier aptly says, “‘plots’ are an expression in Pynchon of the mad belief that *some* plot can ultimately take over the world, can ultimately control life to the

point where it is manageably inanimate." However, finding plots for history is an aesthetic as well as a political activity and the Yeats-Joyce use of myth as Eliot articulated it was designed specifically as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." According to Pynchon such mythic procedure involves "nacreous inference, poetic license and forcible dislocation of personality" into a past where we don't belong and have "no right in." Such mythologizing forces the contingent into a pattern and the fiction of cyclical history, versions of which appear in Yeats, Joyce and Eliot, is no better than the fictions of continuity, progress or the Hegelian fiction of history endowed with reason or spirit. Cyclical history, so often embodied in the structure of the quest, literally "stencilizes" everything; that is, if the Waste Land experience recurs in Dante, the Jacobean and Baudelaire, then the present is a repetition of the past. If Stephen is Telemachus and Bloom, Ulysses, and both are Hamlet and Shakespeare, then the past is a stencil for the present and the future, and history is mechanical repetition. Mythic forms like conspiracy theories of history make the world "manageably inanimate."

Pynchon makes this point in the novel's epilogue, devoted primarily to Stencil's father. At the end of a long life of espionage activities in the British foreign service, the old Victorian realizes that history's plot can never be known. "Short of examining the entire history of each individual participating, . . . short of anatomizing each soul, what hope has anyone of understanding" a historical situation; unless we know "all the accidents — a variation in the weather, the availability of a ship," our interpretations of history are only fictions. Finally the elder Stencil comes to understand that history, like inanimate objects, has no human meaning. "Any Situation takes shape from events much lower than the merely human. It has, like God, its own logic and its own justification for being and the best you can do is cope" with events, with accidents, with contingencies. There is no unity of paradoxes, no Brooksonian drama, in history.

Pynchon's emphasis on myths of history nicely rounds out the contemporary critique of modernist notions of myth and metaphor. We have in these contemporaries a sense that modernist literary conceptions violate the indifferent nature of things, the unique other-

ness of individuals, the unity of self, the values of prose, the accidental nature of events, the partial and artificial nature of literary forms. Robbe-Grillet and Murdoch, Barth and Pynchon share the feeling that the modernist consensus over the nature of myth and metaphor and the centrality of both to literature led to false and disastrous views of the world, to exaggerated claims for poetry and to erroneous systems of value judgement. They desire to get back to particulars, to restore literary language to its proper role which for them means revealing "the raggedness, the incompleteness of it all." They want a literature finally which accurately presents man's place in a world of contingency, a world in which man is free to cope spontaneously with experience.

The critique of modernism that emerges from these writers raises a number of historical and theoretical issues for literary critics. We will want to evaluate the validity of the models contemporaries make of modern literature, to examine the implications of their historical metaphor which implies that the moderns sought an Apollonian unity where contemporaries cautiously celebrate Dionysian contingency. Anyone who knows the moderns (or for that matter the Romantics and Victorians) knows that the distrust of metaphor and the desire for a language of immediate experience is hardly new. It would not be difficult to make a case that the work of these writers really constitutes another manifestation of the modernist rejection of romantic notions of personality and history.

Critics will also want to understand, in addition to the relationship between the contemporaries and the moderns, the connections between these writers and other figures and movements on the contemporary scene. The emphasis on the particular and the concrete surely links these writers with the radical immanentism of the God-is-Dead theologians. Then too, the new literature's concern with freedom, with the contingent and accidental, with the mysteriousness of other persons, would imply a politics very different from the conservative aestheticism of the moderns. Where moderns raged for order, our contemporaries cope with chaos. No doubt similarities exist between the *Weltanschauung* of these writers and the new politics, which works much less with ideologies and much more with the cooperation of individuals confronting a monolithic power structure decked out with a grotesque myth of good and evil, East and West.

Murdoch, whose aesthetics is meant to supply socialism with new and adequate theories of personality, ethics and literary form is obviously the central writer here.

But once we see these historical relationships we will ultimately have to turn to more theoretical tasks, for these writers raise once again the whole question of the nature of metaphor. The problem is the perennial one of the ambiguous position of the language of poetry between truth and lies as dialectical opposites. The moderns faced an attack on metaphor which naïvely tried to disallow its use even in poetry and reacted with a theory which made great claims for metaphor. But now that metaphor has turned out to be an inescapable aspect of language, we can no longer simply question its utility. Rather, as Beda Alleman says, "we have to ask the more complex and indeed more interesting question: How modern poets can come to grips with the metaphorical nature of language in spite of their openly declared dislike of metaphor."

In answering these theoretical questions, in pointing out these historical relationships, we shall have to develop a new mode of criticism. If our concern is to be with the implications of a skeptical and mythoplastic art, we shall have to develop a mythoplastic and skeptical criticism aware of its artificiality, its own limits, its language, its myths and metaphors. Criticism must become a mythoplastic razor if it is to have a reality. Our study of the problematics of metaphor must of necessity include a reconsideration of the problematics of criticism. Hopefully such a criticism would provide us with new insights not only into contemporary writing and into the traditions but into the nature of the critical enterprise.

Richard Wasson

WRITING AND TEACHING

It will not surprise you to know that, as a poet, I have always considered the universality of language as an obstacle to my art. The task is to possess this universal means and make it a private medium of expression. The task is to battle among traditional coherencies and find a new, and individual coherency. The task is to convert the most common, communizing tool of society into a distinctive, distinguishing vernacular and rhythm.

Let me suggest that the perspective of a poet presents simply an extreme view of problems common to everyone, to every student. As a citizen, the challenge is to develop your own political voice and to have that voice heard, unmistakably. As a social creature, the necessity is to wrest a personal accuracy from among general, shared and therefore blurred definitions. As a student, the dilemma may be described as a dilemma of simultaneity; at once, the student must accept, must treat with language as he finds it, and he must translate what he finds into a now personal value.

I mean, English is a foreign language to all of us. It comes to us predetermined and fabulously loaded with associations no one of us dares, sanely, to reject entirely. Through art and through craft, the poet supercedes the barriers to personal expression. Perforce, the citizen repeatedly translates various political phrases such as "top priority," or "law and order." And the consumer is constrained to deflower the lipstick from its covering verbiage that assures an abruptly tropical paradise once money crosses the counter.

Let me be clear: I am not speaking to those programs for so-called disadvantaged students that teach English as a foreign language. I am speaking about all students. I am speaking *from* the perception one specific situation delivers for our general use. We should stubbornly exploit every specific situation for its general meaning.

As teachers, we have to acknowledge that, when students read, theirs is an exercise in familiarizing the hitherto foreign. That is, if we ask students to read Henry James, we are testing whether or not literature can make familiar the unfamiliar historical period, the hitherto unknown persons who preoccupy the novelist. Our job is to ease and to grace this process of translation.

As teachers, when we ask students to write — creatively or critically

—we ask them to translate into their own understanding (their own words) the used language of somebody else. Beside this, the student, as he converts a common language into his medium of special statement, must nevertheless deploy his special coherency so that its chances of meaning, for others, are maximal. This last aspect of the translating process depends upon accuracy and control which, in turn, depend upon a comparatively objective embrace of language as a ready-made tradition. Presumably, whatever literature we judge to deserve student attention will exemplify the most inspiring kind of creative translation we have on record.

Still another dimension of the translating process needs mention. We are all foreigners to each other. We are all different and unknown to each other. And, like it or not, we compose a human marketplace of secret requirements and desires. Or, we embody requirements and desires best termed secret until they have been well, or not so well, communicated and then answered, one way or another. Mastering our language intricately involves the public sale, the public promotion of our interests, our private values, within the competitive drama of society. Mastering English supports our efforts to make ourselves, foreigners to all others, familiar, recognizable and yet desirably distinct, and valuable as a social entity.

The process of translation falters, our mastery of English fails, to the peril of our individual prospects for happiness. Even so, it seems to me that every English/language department should equal the living, the enabling center of education. If we cannot confidently claim such a function, then we ought to close shop for a while and reconsider the content of our teaching purpose.

Foreigners all, together and separately in constructive conflict with language, we must maintain a striving for relevance. That is the purpose of translation: Relevancy to particular person, particular place and contemporary time.

I offer this enlarged view of curricular relevancy as the full frame for our thoughts about the teaching of "disadvantaged students."

When we say "disadvantaged," we probably mean urban and non-white. We certainly mean students who are, comparatively, powerless. The development of a personal politics of language is not generically different, for these students. It is a difference of urgency and degree. Even as the poet incorporates a merely extreme perspective on common problems of language, the "disadvantaged" student merely raises the urgent extreme of rightful demands regarding curriculum and its service.

When we approach Black students, we have to intensify our attempts

to aid accuracy, control and usable translation. Not abandon — intensify. For the literature and the language of English pose problems beyond those of a foreign but neutral body of social knowledge. In America, we grip with a language and a literature frequently hostile to the self-esteem, frequently destroying the valid history, of Black students. Any child can tell you what to expect if somebody says: "I'm putting you down in my *black book*." Lawrence Durrell has written one of those.

Or, consider two examples from Shakespeare: It so happens that Caliban in *The Tempest*, an emphatically black creature, is the product of copulation by a witch and a devil. And it so happens that Othello, "*such a thing as thou*," confronts the question: "Are you a man? Have you a soul or sense?" It so happens that William Blake, in his time a poet characterized by rare humane concern for all society, wrote a poem called "Little Black Boy." And this poem culminates with the promise, meant to reassure the little black boy, that when he gets to heaven he will be like the little white boy. Note: heaven will not bless the black boy's identity, it will change his identity. Now you may have some trouble teaching *The Tempest*, or Blake's poem, to students, generally. If you attempt the teaching of these to Black students, you will have a whole lot of trouble, i.e., a whole lot of work to do. If not, something is wrong. Translation is not taking place. Relevancy has not been sought and found. The foreign phenomenon remains remote material, i.e., useless to the student.

Across the country, Black students call for Black Studies. It has been asserted that "the proper study of mankind is man." Let us surely understand that Black Studies for Black students is absolutely just one phrasing of a universal summoning: Studies Relevant to *my* Life. In the instance of Black students, the summons comes out of a social history that has denied the factual relevancy of Black American life. Curriculum changes, to present, accurately, the continuing fact and relevancy of Black life, should be demanded by all of us. That is: perpetual revising of curriculum, in the light of truthfulness, should undergird all the knowledge we accept as humanly valuable.

In the instance of English teaching, Studies Relevant to My Life translates as progress towards a personal politics of language.

It has been my privilege to teach a perhaps unusual variety of students: I have taught Freshman English at City College where my students were mainly young, white men interested in engineering or medicine; students of an Upward Bound Program — who were mainly

Black teenagers from economically impoverished backgrounds; writing courses at Connecticut College where the students were mainly white and middle or upper class; and currently an English course in the S.E.E.K. program at City College, here in New York. The students at City College are mainly voting-age adults, or older, and Puerto Rican or Black. I have tried to serve all of these students according to my goal for English studies.

I have asked students to read and then critically enmesh Freud's lectures on the psychology of errors with Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*. They have studied Whitehead's *Aims of Education* and evaluated their own education according to these and their own criteria. They have selected advertisements they regard as persuasive and analyzed the verbal factors explaining the appeal. They have written their own, rival copy for advertisements and tested the force of their word power by presenting the material in class. They have selected numerous examples of daily political rhetoric and composed their own rejoinder editorials. They have experimented with word power by writing a composition of 500 words and then rewriting to a limit of 150. As to readings, perhaps the Upward Bound program will illustrate.

I was permitted to design the curriculum for half the students, last summer. Mindful of Shelley's dictum that ignorance is at once the cause and the effect of tyranny, I thought to organize our readings so that we would widely circle the human experience of poverty. We began with Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children*, then we read Swift's "Modest Proposal," then Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, then *My Childhood* by Maxim Gorky, and last, the *Mask of Anarchy*, "Song to the Men of England," and the "Fifth Canto" from "Queen Mab," by Shelley. In addition, the students searched the papers and magazines for current examples of poverty. We included every form of poverty: not only imposed or inherited poverty of place, status and pocket, but poverty of spirit, poverty of imagination and the poverty of conscience concerned us. Much happened. When I told these children about the children of Biafra, and we looked at *Life* magazine photographs showing literal starvation, the Connecticut children became incensed and, on their own time, they wrote to the Governor, the congressmen, state newspapers, members of national magazine staffs, television personalities and so forth. They wrote asking for action. That was the first breakthrough of the summer. Quite apart from the political effectiveness of their campaign, which was no worse than our adult effectiveness, the students' writing leaped into an eloquent fluency that had never even been hinted in their earlier work. When we discussed Steinbeck's hopes

as he created his novel, we decided to secure NET's 1967 documentary on American migrant workers, *What Harvest for the Reaper*. The shock came when we realized that *The Grapes of Wrath* sustains a horrifying relevance to migrant workers today. Angry about the political inconsequence of their Biafra protest, the students elected, again on their own time, to organize a Wrath Rally. Purpose: to focus public concern on the appalling status of migrant workers in America. For the rally, students wrote 1968 "Modest Proposals," and invited the public as well as appropriate state officials to attend and participate. On the programs issued to the audience, the students chose two stanzas from Shelley's "Song to the Men of England": "The seed ye sow, another reaps: / the wealth ye find, another keeps: the robes ye weave, another wears: the arms ye forge, another bears. / Sow seed,—but let no tyrant reap; Find wealth,—let no imposter heap; Weave robes—let not the idle wear; forge arms,—in your defence to bear." I will never forget the dedication of the students to their purpose, the intensity of their reading and planning, the fantastic transformation of their writing into compositions of pamphleteer strength, the merciful vigor of their competing Proposals *à la* Jonathan Swift.

If it can be said that their work produced no necessary legislation and reform, it can also be said that this very failure instructed us all. We learned, from the unsuccessful Biafra campaign, from the unsuccessful Wrath Rally and from Gorky's depiction of violence as a corollary of impoverishment much more than we could have imagined, about poverty.

We learned about the bone and blood ironies the poor confront: We found that the elimination of poverty requires the creation of love and the protection of life within the context of chronic and terrible violence.

The elimination of poverty requires powerful, right action by those who have no power.

Thus, the elimination of poverty demands an impossible challenging of the status quo.

And we concluded that we should begin by insisting that the spirit poverties of the rich and of the powerful are the first poverties to be erased and then replaced by rational generosity and moral service.

Everything we read and everything we wrote, quite literally, translated into action: it became part of our hopeful, conscious lives.

June Jordan

THEATER 69

The 1968–69 theater season was chiefly notable for an efflorescence of “black” plays and for the fullest diet we have yet had of “new theater” — particularly as presented by The Performance Group (*Dionysus in '69*), The Living Theater and the Open Theater. These are the two features of the season I want to comment on at length, but let me first mention briefly a variety of other theatrical events, if for no other reason than that many have been praised out of all proportion to their merit (and a few unwarrantably ignored).

A number of our better-known writers were represented this season, but in almost every case, their plays were a disappointment. Jack Gelber's *The Cuban Thing*, at its core contrived and trivial, was a far — and alarming — cry from his earlier work, *The Connection*, a play of intense seriousness, of almost obsessional authenticity. . . . Equally depressing was Tennessee Williams' *Bar in a Tokyo Hotel*, an album of lifeless photos from his earlier plays — the sexual aberrant, the suffering artist, the tyrannical female — all further deadened by being embalmed in a stilted, pseudo-philosophical prose. Williams has lately been giving his plays to directors who are pretentious lightweights (last year it was José Quintero, this year Herbert Machiz) — but perhaps the plays have only been seeking their proper instruments. . . . At the Gelber and Williams evenings my primary reaction was bewilderment and sadness, respectively. At Joseph Heller's *We Bombed in New Haven*, it was anger: the grandiosity was so immense, the accomplishment so slight; Heller's “philosophizing” is on a par with his dramatic sense — which is to say, rudimentary. . . . Another talented writer gone bad this season was Israel Horowitz. His *Honest-To-God Schnozzola*, a grab-bag of overworked symbols of decadence (even to a dwarf!) à la Isherwood and the thirties, proved a poor successor to his impressive debut last season in *The Indian Wants the Bronx*. . . . Harold Pinter fared slightly better. His two short plays, *Tea Party* and *Basement*, at least had effective moments (especially *Basement*). But they suffered from their origins as television scripts, designed as they obviously were to take advantage of the medium's ability to accomplish visually sudden shifts of mood and scene. The stage can't accommodate such quick shifts; they come through only as painful pauses, unexplained transitions. Pinter's best work is characteristically spare and elusive, but these two

short plays were instead merely sketchy and episodic. . . . Most disappointing of all this season (maybe because I'd liked *In Circles* so much last year) was Al Carmines' *Peace*, based on Aristophanes' *The Birds*. Carmines (and his director, Lawrence Kornfeld) have always worked precariously near the edge of cuteness (as have so many other productions at the Judson Memorial Church). In last year's *In Circles* Carmines managed to channel the tendency towards preciousness into effective whimsy — but then he had the integrity and discipline of Gertrude Stein's book to serve as a check on his own coy eclecticism. He had no such help this year from Timothy Reynolds, who did the book for *Peace*. Reynolds' adolescent translation of Aristophanes relies for its humor on jokes about feces and for its topicality on "in" references to Koutoukas, Tom Eyn and Rochelle Owens — exactly the sort of book calculated to bring out the silly side of Carmines and Kornfeld. What was most depressing about *Peace* (and about Tennessee Williams' *Bar in a Tokyo Hotel*) was that the failure was not creative. It didn't suggest, that is, a talent trying to extend itself into new areas. Instead both Carmines and Williams simply reused their own earlier inventions — but in ways that caricatured and trivialized them.

Still holding "black" theater and "new" theater for later, I'd say that only three playwrights turned in work this season that was at all distinguished: Edward Albee, Jules Feiffer and Ronald Tavel — in ascending order. Albee's offering, a double bill of short plays, had only limited rewards. The first play, *Box*, despite some nice incidental seagull and ocean sound effects, was otherwise pretentious gibberish. But some of the intricate monologues in the second play, *Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, had considerable power, effectively suggesting that "nothing belongs," that personal memory and public utterances alike numb us by their meaningless repetition. "Only craft is left now," Albee seems to be saying in the play's best moments — empty, unrelated boxes, sound manufactured. I should add, though, that when "interpreting" Albee, I always feel vaguely resentful, as if I were engaged in some subtle kind of self-degradation — for one can't help but be aware that the game of interpretation works with Albee not because his plays have the density that allows for multiple ramification, but because they are so hollow that all interpretations reverberate with equal intensity.

Jules Feiffer's *Little Murders* is far more satisfying. Aside from writing some hilarious lines, Feiffer chillingly conveys the feel of a city (or a country) in process of disintegration — and since the play was

first written several years ago, it can be viewed as prophecy, further confirming Feiffer's incisiveness as a social critic. Even so, the evening is only a partial success. Despite the brilliant inventions of director Alan Arkin and some splendid performances, especially by Elizabeth Wilson, *Little Murders* never quite integrates the two levels, real and surreal, on which it's meant to operate; the semiindividualized characterizations of the play's first half don't sufficiently prepare for the semiarchetypal abstractions of the second.

The one playwright this season about whom I can work up any pronounced enthusiasm is Ronald Tavel. He is the chief luminary of what he has himself dubbed The Theater of the Ridiculous — though I think it might more aptly be named the Theater of Fantasy, since, to quote a Tavel line, it scorns "questions whose only jurisdiction is the brain." This year, rather belatedly, I caught up with Tavel's work, seeing his two new plays, *Arenas of Lutetia* and *Boy on the Straight-Back Chair*, and a revival by John Vaccaro (another Ridiculous luminary) of Tavel's earlier play, *The Life of Lady Godiva*. *Arenas* was the least impressive of the three, perhaps because Tavel made the mistake of directing it himself, and at a pace and volume so hysterical that it was impossible to hear half the lines. That can often be a blessing in the theater, but not with Tavel, whose verbal ingenuity is his most pronounced talent.

Tavel needs a director able to discipline, without at the same time strangling, his intricate inventions and parodies. A director, that is, like John Vaccaro. His revival of *Lady Godiva* at the Gotham Art Theater was a triumph of artificiality — brittle, polished, exquisitely mannered and, not least, very funny. Vaccaro's elaborate tableaux are the appropriate visual counterpart for Tavel's conviction that "it's all in the how, not the what," and his transvestite visions are a perfect embodiment of Tavel's insight into "the changing fashions of madness." Yet impressive though the production was (more so, indeed, than the script), hysteria, even when functional, becomes tiresome, and two acts of *Godiva* proved one too many.

Tavel's own talents were best revealed in the American Place Theater production of *Boy on the Straight-Back Chair*, a kind of horror version of *Our Town* — the freakiness of everyday life. Tavel was greatly aided by a clever director, Lee Von Rhau, by the lyrical, ironic music of Orville Stoeber (who is all of twenty-one and who, I'm willing to bet, is going to have a notable career as both composer and performer), and by some highly stylized acting, especially that of Jacque Lynn Colton, who was so impressive last year in Carmines' *In Circles*.

Unfortunately, Kevin O'Connor, an actor who has always enjoyed far better reviews than he deserved, had the central role and failed to take advantage of its many possibilities.

For the first half of *Boy*, Tavel's marvelous facility, his barbed mockeries, his refusal to take seriously anything but private fantasy ("I feel compassion." "Why?" "It's a warm, sweet feeling."), make for a great deal of elaborate fun. And also for considerable disquiet. By juxtaposing sentimentality and brutality ("Lovely Mary's" mother describes her daughter's "sweet" graduation dress just as Mary, having been bludgeoned to death, is being buried by her slayers), Tavel compellingly demonstrates the horrors of our national mentality, at once bathetic and sadistic.

But Tavel trades too long and relies too heavily on word-play. By the second half of *Boy*, as his invention flags, he falls back on mere technique, especially the tiresome trick of picking up a word from one line and using it to invent the next ("Take stock in what I say." "There's talk about them stock piles again."). Too much of the second part of *Boy* is tired parody ("let's war to end all wars") and third-rate punning (like referring to the character "Bad Butch" as "a son of a butch"). But though *Boy* fails to sustain itself, there can be no doubt that Tavel has a formidable array of talents. With a little more control, a little less self-indulgence, he could well emerge as a major dramatist.

The season somewhat compensated for the lack of writing talent by offering an extraordinary amount of acting talent. Many of the widely heralded performances actually merited the praise heaped upon them: Bernadette Peters showed astonishing timing, control and charm in recreating the stereotypical musical comedy star of the thirties—innocent, stupid and thoroughly ingratiating—in *Dames at Sea*, itself a complete delight in its second act, though in its first, too often plain silly instead of the parody of silliness intended. . . . In Terence McNally's short play, *Next*, James Coco managed the difficult feat of bridging the almost unconnected halves of the play, one comic, one tragic, by underplaying the gag lines and by suggesting from the start that the character, seemingly the embodiment of a one-dimensional fat-man joke, had an underside of torment and rage. . . . James Earl Jones in *The Great White Hope* managed an even more astonishing balancing act: to be powerful without being frightening, ingratiating without being servile, unlettered without being stupid, degraded without being diminished. . . . Donald Pleasance in *The Man in the Glass Booth* did his brilliant best to convert the play's false clues and smug uncertainties into a deliberate,

half-crazed ambiguity. That he was finally defeated was due both to Robert Shaw's failure as author to clarify his intentions, and to Harold Pinter's insistence as director on emphasizing the script's words rather than actions, thereby making the play more static and explicit than necessary; Pinter apparently failed to realize that with a playwright less verbally gifted than he, the concentration on words would prove a disservice. . . . *Does a Tiger Wear a Necktie?* boasted a number of fine performances. Al Pacino as the border-line psychotic and Lauren Jones as the tough-tender girl, won well-deserved attention for their performances. On the other hand, Hal Holbrook's surface acting fared far better with the critics than it should have, while three actors in smaller roles, Roger Robinson, Lazaro Perez and Bruce Scott, received less notice than their talents deserved (the play, incidentally, had some touching, funny moments, though it was badly marred by predictability and some awkward, expository writing). . . . A few other outstanding performances went largely unrecognized: Sam Schacht played the small part of a Nazi officer with sustained intensity in George Tabori's talky, unfocused *The Cannibals*. . . . Erica Yohn's subtle, varied portrait of the mother in Boris Vian's *The Empire Builders*, like most good performances in badly received plays, went unnoticed. . . . Brian Bedford fared better with the critics because they are always nervously well-disposed toward "classics" and Bedford appeared in two this season: *The Cocktail Party* and *The Misanthrope*. But the subtlety of his talents didn't get sufficient recognition. Bedford, who is English, has the kind of economy of gesture and precise timing not often seen in American actors; he can do more with the shading of his voice or the slight movement of his eyes than most actors can when pulling out all the stops. . . . Gordon Davidson's fine production of Heinar Kipphardt's relentlessly rational *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer* boasted not one, but a half dozen of that rarest Broadway phenomenon: a good character performance by a middle-aged male. Eduard Franz, Ralph Bell, Stefan Schnable, Tony van Bridge and Stephen Elliott all turned in splendidly focused, intelligent performances, while Herbert Berghof, who is all too rarely seen, turned in, as always, a brilliantly detailed one. . . . Some performances this season I thought overpraised: Alex McCowen, in *Hadrian VII* did show enough mechanical brilliance to warrant some of the attention lavished on him, but like the play itself, McCowen's performance had no core, mistaking theatrical effects for theatrical characterization, cheap titillation for substantive detail. . . . I had mixed feelings, too, about Dustin Hoffman in *Jimmy Shine*. An actor of undoubted charm and skill, he sometimes works his assets so hard that

his performance becomes mannered; his excesses in *Jimmy Shine* were probably excusable, though, for the play is so empty of all but clichés that Hoffman might have understandably decided that both he and it would come to a permanent halt if he stopped moving for a second. . . . Nicol Williamson's *Hamlet* had to work within a production basically at odds with itself. Not only did the abstract sets and the traditional brocades of the costuming directly contradict each other, but the mediocrity and even vulgarity of the supporting performances (excepting Roger Livesey and Mark Dignam) continually dissipated whatever force Williamson tried to accumulate. For the production failings, Tony Richardson, the director, must bear responsibility, but Nicol Williamson's difficulties were partly of his own making. The reviewers said much about his "working-class" interpretation of *Hamlet*, but in fact he offers no clear-cut interpretation. He does give *Hamlet* energy, tension and emotional intensity and thus rescues the Prince from the shadow foppiness in which Gielgud, with his emphasis on indecisiveness, intellectuality and Oxbridge poetics, always cast him. But in not allowing *Hamlet*'s rediscovered passion to play against irresolutions of mind, Williamson, too, ends by creating a one-dimensional portrait.

Black Theater

Eight of the plays this season about (and six of them by) blacks seem to me to warrant some separate discussion. The worst of the eight, produced by the Negro Ensemble Company, was Ray McIver's *God is a (guess what?)*, a dreary, platitudinous script as empty of thought as of theatricality (sample: "You want to see a God? — look in the mirror"). The talented Michael A. Schultz, who won the director's Obie last year for his fine production of *The Lusitanian Bogey*, tried to make a virtue of McIver's stereotypes by staging them in the cartoon style of a minstrel show. This gave the evening what little energy it had, but not even Schultz's desperate inventions could rescue a play so devoid of inherent interest.

The critical praise for McIver's play was as nothing compared to the hosannahs that greeted the Ensemble Company's second production, Lonne Elder III's *Ceremonies in Dark Old Men*. The play almost won the Tony award for best of the year (and perhaps it should have, since the winner, *The Great White Hope*, which I'll discuss in a moment, may have had even less to recommend it). *Ceremonies* centers on a contemporary Harlem family but the relationships that contribute to its collapse, especially the relationship between the two sons, are at once

so incompletely and so predictably developed that the tale becomes an interminable cliché. Nor did the production offer many compensations — as it usually does with the talented Ensemble Company. Some performances, particularly Samuel Blue Jr.'s, were simply bad; others, like Douglas Turner's as the father, were uneven. For this Edmund Cambridge, the director, undoubtedly bears much responsibility. With a wordy script under constant threat of stagnation, the acting pace should have been varied, quick, sometimes glancing; instead, Cambridge belabored every line, apparently in the dazed belief, shared by most of the critics, that he was dealing with a prose masterpiece.

Like all bad art, *Ceremonies* has interest only as sociology — and precious little even then. According to a "black militant" whom *Newsweek* invited to be guest critic of *Ceremonies*, the play tells us "where it's at." I wonder. If *Ceremonies* had been written by a white, it might well have been denounced by the militants as a tissue of clichés and slanders, for the portrait of black life which it draws is a compound of middle-class hopes and aspirations generously sprinkled with dope, sex and the rackets. If this is "where it's at," then old-fashioned liberals should take heart: blacks, it would seem from the play, are not so different from whites as the militants have been insisting, and such differences as do exist spring not from mysterious new ingredients like "soul," but from old familiars like a higher incidence of sexual activity and drug addiction. I, for one, am not convinced.

Neither, apparently, is the New Lafayette Theater, a non-profit organization located in Harlem, and "dedicated to the expression of those truths that enrich the experience of being Black." This season, the first in its new location (its earlier home burned down), the New Lafayette presented *In the Wine Time* by its resident playwright, Ed Bullins. It fascinated me that *In the Wine Time*, produced by an organization consciously devoted to Black Power, was the only "black" play I saw this season not obsessed by Whitey. There were, to be sure, occasional references, but the central purpose of the play was "to celebrate the Black experience" for fellow blacks. This is no more nor less than the New Lafayette's official credo promised, but it is always a surprise when rhetoric and practice coincide.

Clarity and fidelity of purpose, however, have never yet guaranteed artistic success. *In the Wine Time* does not reverse my opinion of last season (based on an evening of Bullins' short plays done at the American Place) that his reputation has outpaced his performance. On the one hand, *Wine Time* is attenuated — a one-acter stretched into three — yet, on the other, its melodramatic ending is insufficiently prepared for,

and is even at odds with the desultory humor and fitful tensions that precede it.

The production of *Wine Time* seemed as unfinished as the script, though it had much to recommend it. Roberta Raysor provided a low-keyed but well-suited set design, Gary Bolling showed fine potential as an actor, and some of the ensemble work of the company, especially in the third act, was beautifully meshed. But Robert Macbeth's staging (he is artistic director of the New Lafayette), was frequently clumsy and at critical moments badly paced; Macbeth has a habit of moving actors into the audience out of an apparent hope of heightening — but with a timing that in fact dissipates — dramatic impact.

Ed Bullins occupies much the position in today's vanguard of black writers that Lorraine Hansberry did ten years ago. The differences between their generations — as well as some surprising similarities — were highlighted this season by an evening compiled from Miss Hansberry's work, entitled *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*. The differences are matters more of content than form. Some of Miss Hansberry's attitudes (though not all) are decidedly out of fashion with black playwrights now. For example, the self-portrait she draws of herself as a young co-ed is far closer to the heroine of any standard McCall's serial about life in a white college dorm than to the experiences of today's black collegians. And her love of country ("I walk in my American streets again"), hedged with whatever doubts and increasingly superceded in the last years of her life by concern for her fellow blacks, would be unthinkable for a Bullins or a Leroi Jones — as would her ambivalence about whether she considered herself a revolutionary.

These differences in theme and attitude between the fifties and sixties are well-known and come as no surprise. But what did catch me off balance when I saw the Hansberry, Bullins and Elder plays within a few weeks of each other was how similar they are in structure. All three focus on narrative: they tell stories about recognizable people, and recount the outward actions and events of their lives. And all three have only slight affinity for experimental form (this is somewhat less true of Bullins). Hansberry is the only one who openly mocks avant-garde theater (the "universal play," she writes, will be about two men married to each other, and its action will take place "entirely in a refrigerator"), but she in fact represents the sensibilities of all three.

The continuity between Hansberry, Bullins and Elder becomes all the more apparent when compared with the work of Adrienne Kennedy, a black playwright whose two short plays were produced at the Public Theater this season under the title *Cities in Bezique*. Miss Kennedy, like so many of her white contemporaries in the theater (especially Rochelle

Owens, Ronald Tavel and Leonard Melfi), is absorbed by her private fantasies, her interior world. She disdains narrative, "everyday" language and human interaction; the dream, the myth, the poem are her domain. Unfortunately, she is not a good poet: her images are fuzzy, her intentions obscure, her language so self-enclosed as to be largely inaccessible. But in her rejection of thematic materials and of narrative techniques, she makes clear her own distance from the traditional theater of Lorraine Hansberry — and from most of her black contemporaries like Ed Bullins and Lonne Elder, as well.

The "black" play this season that most resembled the world of Lorraine Hansberry was *The Great White Hope* by Howard Sackler, a white playwright. It's no accident that this play, in sensibility so close to the fifties, should be the big hit of the 1969 season; the majority of theater-goers, like the majority of voters, are currently opting for the fifties with a vengeance. The shamelessness with which *The Great White Hope* perpetrates its stereotypes—from the hellfire preacher to a temperance parade to a cakewalk—almost makes them palatable: there's something ingratiating about brass. And the brass has been polished to an astonishing brilliance by Edwin Sherin, the director. He plays the whole evening at fortissimo, manipulating a huge cast and some nineteen scenes with the razzmatazz of the best TV commercials and with an opulence reminiscent (and worthy) of Flo Ziegfeld. But neither Sherin's breathlessness nor the brilliance of the play's star, James Earl Jones, could save an evening so synthetic at its center. Heavy-handed, stale, overly explicit, the script lumbers around in some junkyard of black-white clichés, as old-fashioned in its rhetoric and romanticism as the worst of Hansberry — and therefore as spankingly up to date.

Big-Time Buck White, also written by a white (Joseph Dolan Tuotti), was marked in its opening section by some extraordinary ensemble work in which the acting company managed the difficult double feat of conveying militancy while at the same time parodying it. But when the play moved on to a "public meeting," the phony exchanges with the audience and the windiness of the rhetoric became tedious. Buck White's clichés are of more recent vintage than Howard Sackler's, but they have been repeated almost as often.

The most impressive "black" play this season — and in part because it least fits that or any category — is Charles Gordone's *No Place To Be Somebody*. The play has many things wrong with it. Gordone ticks off entrances and exits with the suspect precision of a metronome; he has written some badly motivated scenes (like the shooting of Sweets Crane) and some stilted or implausible dialogue; he interjects "symbolist"

monologues which are sometimes powerful in themselves, but which tend to stop the play in its tracks; his main narrative line—Johnny Williams' determination to form a black Mafia—is held back so long that it's all but overwhelmed by the tangle of subplots. *No Place*, in short, is full of defects; a big hulk of an unrealized play, badly in need of cutting, focusing, development.

But by the time the play had ended—and it lasted more than three hours—I didn't care much about its inadequacies. The sheer imagination of the piece—its vivid streaks of language, its bizarre visions—press against the play's antique narrative structure, spill over and, happily, inundate it. This is due in no small part to Ron O'Neal's performance as "Gabe." It's impossible to know whether the lyrical, mannered touches in O'Neal's acting style are a function of his personality or of his understanding of the needs of the play, but in any case, they are exactly right. O'Neal suddenly shifts (like the play itself), from a straightforward delivery to a quirky, poetic quality that lifts us out of any recognizable time or space—and he perfectly controls both moods. I'd never heard of O'Neal before, nor of the playwright, Charles Gordone. But I think we'll be hearing more from both—and, hopefully, in tandem.

The "New Theater"

To many, "new theater" is synonymous with new permissiveness in displaying the human body and discussing or demonstrating its sexual uses, a hardly innovative idea unless we dismiss the whole history of burlesque. In fact, what I'd call the "new theater"—as represented by the work of The Performance Group, The Living Theater and the Open Theater, is far more innovative in its strategies and aims. But since "physicality"—using the form, movement and rhythms of the body to supplement or displace language—is a genuine link between the new permissiveness and the new theater, first let me briefly discuss the three most notorious examples of the former: *Geese*, *Che* and *Oh! Calcutta!*.

Geese is one of those hilariously bad plays that restore one's faith in the banality of deviance. The essence of the evening is easily captured: first two pretty boys, then two pretty girls fondle each other in various stages of undress. The voyeuristic appeal (they *are* pretty), combined with the astonishing stupidity of every aspect of the production, certainly keeps the evening from being dull. And *Geese* does confirm—if one is interested in sociology—that in our culture we continue to reveal the poverties of sex under the assumption that we are talking about the varieties of love.

Che, on the other hand, bored me so much that I finally walked out (discreetly waiting until climax had been reached on stage) — and I saw the original version, before a bust by the D.A.'s office led to the addition of "see-through vinyl costumes." These may have proved a blessing in disguise, for unlike *Geese* and *Oh! Calcutta!*, the bods in *Che* were decidedly under par, and for diversion the audience had actually to listen to the excruciatingly tedious script, a series of one-line aphorisms that swiftly benumbed mind and senses ("Laughter indicts your cool"; "Affection is despair"; etc., etc.). *Che* gave pornography a bad name, for although — to rate it according to the legal definition — it was "unredeemed by artistic merit," it was also, alas, unredeemed by any ability to "prurient arousal."

Oh! Calcutta! achieved a notoriety exceeding both *Geese* and *Che*. Two comments seem worth making. First, despite a list of contributors that included Samuel Beckett, Jules Feiffer, John Lennon, Sam Shepard and Tennessee Williams, the production was homogenized to such a consistent level of blandness as to make the speculation on which contributor wrote what scene of no interest. Second, *Oh! Calcutta!* did confirm the distinction between nakedness and nudity originally made by Sir Kenneth Clark: "to be naked," he wrote, "is to be deprived of our clothes, and the word implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel for that condition. The word nude, on the other hand, carries in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenseless body, but of a balanced, prosperous and confident body." *Oh! Calcutta!* was the only skin show this season to approach Nudity — unself-consciousness about being without clothes. But that is exactly what defeated its stated purpose of erotic arousal. In our culture, the unclad body becomes an erotic object only when it can be associated with the embarrassment most of us feel when taking off our clothes before making love. Nudity — the self-confident luxuriating in our bodies — is not a situation familiar to most of us, not an occasion we associate with sex — and therefore not an occasion, when represented on a stage, likely to arouse our lust. If the Authorities, therefore, were fearful of theater which incited prurient interest, as they claimed, they made a shrewd distinction in raiding *Che* while allowing *Oh! Calcutta!* to proceed unmolested (though they failed to notice, or at least did not share my opinion, that the naked bodies revealed in *Che*, though decidedly embarrassed, were also decidedly unattractive).

Grotowski's Polish Lab Theater, the Performance Group, The Living Theater, The Open Theater and Peter Brook's projects with the

Royal Shakespeare Company all share certain identifying marks. These were described by Richard Schechner, founder and director of The Performance Group (which this season presented *Dionysus in '69*) in a *Times* article of January 12, 1969, as a concern for "communities, personal confrontation, experiments with text, audience and space." Spelling out those goals in more detail, Schechner explained that the new theater groups want to find a place for nonverbal as well as verbal language ("to articulate their bodies as well as their heads and hands"), to establish new audience-performer relationships and to create a theater that would "define 'ritual' for our time" and serve as an instrument for reconstructing society.

I am sympathetic to most of these aims of the new theater. And I realize, too, that they can't be achieved overnight; many experiments and even false starts will be necessary. (Schechner, for one, is well aware that theories are one thing and performances another, that the new theater "has a long way to go. It is plagued by part-time commitments, lack of discipline, no-talent performers and directors.") Yet after making all allowance for the necessary errors of a beginning, and with a willing sympathy for the new theater, I still have to judge The Performance Group (however provisionally) on the basis of what it's presented so far. And on that basis, the news is not good.

According to Schechner, the new theater groups want to give their members "more than employment or even a place where art can flourish"; they want to provide as well an environment where personal growth and a microcosmic confrontation with social problems become possible. "Life style and performing style," Schechner believes, "are not separable. You simply cannot be a great performer and a lousy human being." But that, it seems to me, is nonsense. W. C. Fields was widely regarded as "a lousy human being" — he was also a great performer. Moreover, Schechner at least implies that if one is a fine human being, the transition to becoming a fine performer is not only simplified but probably assured.

Judging from *Dionysus*, I would say The Performance Group is encouraging counterfeit versions of both personal and professional growth. Under the guise of promoting an awareness of the body, of spontaneity, of a ritual sharing between performers and audience, *et. al.*, it is sponsoring only the spurious versions of these — self-indulgence, voyeurism and exhibitionism.

Most members of an audience have a sense of privacy that won't allow them to engage in acts of intimacy, or exposures of their deepest feelings in front of strangers. If a total stranger, actor or not, comes

over and starts rubbing their leg, or shouts at them to shed middle-class inhibitions and join the on-stage orgy — a simulated, a phony one, at that — they retreat from the assault, turn off their emotions, and feel outraged at the intrusion into their privacy. Schechner would argue, of course, that to leave an audience alone is to settle for the traditional solution of how performers and audience should share their space. Yet, assuming that new audience-performer relationships are needed, it scarcely follows that all experiments done in that name become self-validating. The crassness of the Performance Group's assault on the audience prevents many of its members from participating in even the traditional sense of listening and privately responding to the events on stage. And where *Dionysus* does bring some members of the audience into closer physical contact with the performers, the basis and quality of the contact is itself at issue, for the main experience being shared, it seemed to me, was self-congratulation. Those who joined the revels seemed more engaged in a kind of revival meeting, a gathering of the faithful to confirm the rightness, the superiority of their way, than in the personal confrontation or the encounter between seekers that Schechner claims to be advancing.

His brave formulas for revising the traditional roles of playwright and text prove equally disastrous when measured by actual results. It is fine in theory (so I think, at least), not to allow the written word to dominate totally the purposes of a performing group, to use the text instead as one element in helping the group to articulate individual and collective purposes. But the *particular* uses to which The Performance Group has put Euripides' *The Bacchae* are confused and puerile. There is nothing wrong, on the face of it, with mixing the classic Greek text with contemporary allusions and jargon; it is quite possible that the two could be combined in ways illuminating to both. But this is not the case with *Dionysus*. Instead of the classic and the contemporary subtly intermingling, they crudely jar; one actor, delivering a speech from *The Bacchae*, for example, is suddenly interrupted by another actor asking a third, "Is he putting us on?", and "Is Vicki taking tickets at the door?" The result is hokum, the Elks in loin cloth — though the Elks, to be fair, are masters of ritual. If *Dionysus* had been deliberately designed to suggest that the radical young are mindless and vulgar, it could hardly have achieved its purpose more completely. Fortunately, the radical young are far better than this farrago which pretends to represent them — and so they will survive it.

The Living Theater, while in some ways more horrendous even

than The Performance Group, at least benefits from its attitude of total involvement with its own creations; absolute conviction, even when what it's projecting is abhorrent, can have compelling force — the medium, in other words, can sometimes be separated from the message.

Two of The Living Theater's four productions, *Frankenstein* and *Antigone*, seemed to me very nearly without merit. There was a good deal of technical brilliance in *Frankenstein* — especially in the scene when words are fed into the brain — though it seems bizarre for a group in rebellion against our emergent technetronic society to sport as its chief virtue the very technological mastery for which that society is most noted. *Antigone*, too, had its moments: some group tableaux effectively portrayed a mob's brutality, and sudden shifts in tone, which at first seemed pointless, gradually did work to convey the senseless, erratic fluctuations of men in the mass.

But both productions handled *myth* and *ritual* — those catch-all justifications for the "new" — with a drawn out explicitness that always suggests limited resources of imagination. "Messages" were stated so obviously and so repetitively ("there is much that is monstrous; nothing more monstrous than man"), that they excluded any prospect of successful politicizing. Looking and behaving like the least talented performers in a Warhol film, the actors alternated between total artifice and total naturalness with such an apparent uncomprehension of which direction they were taking as to destroy any confidence in the intelligence of their intentions.

The third production, *mysteries and smaller pieces*, was altogether better. Where the physical movement in *Antigone* obscured rather than elucidated the text, in *mysteries* the nonverbal and verbal renewed and reinforced each other. And where *Antigone* meandered purposelessly, *mysteries* shifted pacing and tone in ways that suggested a careful weighing of detail and some degree of assurance about the desired effect. The "incense" scene, for example, a gentle invitation to serenity, was followed, in a brilliant juxtaposition, by Julian Beck, cross-legged center stage, leading the audience in a mounting frenzy of political exhortation ("stop the wars"; "free all men"), inducing them to put aside quiescence for activism. Following this, part of the audience (about 150 people, I would judge) joined The Living Theater troupe on stage, arms on one another's shoulders, humming and singing together. Though a large group, they seemed extraordinarily sensitized to each other, and a minimal gesture — Beck moving his eyes, for example — was sufficient to produce a shift in mood or posture. This was all, to be sure, a little sinister: it suggested how susceptible masses of people are to subtle

manipulation. But it was moving, too — a celebration of brotherhood, a sort of unplanned Esalen exercise (interestingly, no new recruits from the audience came up on stage after a certain point — as if everyone understood that once a given amount of experience had been shared on stage, the circle was necessarily completed, closed to outsiders).

But at that point in the evening the troupe's characteristic self-indulgence and self-righteousness set in. Acting exercises, briefly interesting as demonstrations in surprise, in body flexibility, in inventiveness, in the possibilities of shared games, were allowed to go on interminably. Freshness invariably gave way to tedium. And the final scene of the evening, a literal rendering of *After The Bomb*, during which "bodies" were endlessly carried and stacked on stage, failed to convey the horrors of such a possibility simply because of its childish literal-mindedness and repetition and its overwhelming aura of self-congratulation ("*we* know what's coming and *we* are warning you").

The Becks seem to believe that members of the audience who laugh during that last scene — and there were many who did the night I attended — are laughing at WAR or at THE BOMB. But it seemed more likely that they are deriding the pretentiousness, the self-important posturing of the troupe. It's characteristic of The Living Theater to insist that any negative reaction to its work necessarily reflects the inadequacies of those who disapprove, that if an audience laughs during a moment of High Seriousness, that, *prima facie*, is proof that it's impenetrable to challenge. Which, if one wanted to get entangled in that kind of circular argument, is exactly what one might say of the Becks.

The Living Theater's unlimited smugness emerged most strongly in its final production, *Paradise Now*. To have remained in the theater for 4–5 hours without feeling bored, as I did, may only be testimony to a large capacity for indignation, since that's how I responded to most of what I saw. The entire evening — thanks to the joint efforts of the troupe and the audience — was closer to a mass adolescent temper tantrum than to anything else I've seen, short of one of the goonier kinds of political rally.

Julian Beck, his scarecrow body taut, his cold eyes radiating self-righteousness, got things going by screaming, "I am not allowed to take my clothes off" — to which my instant reaction (I was still in a good humor) was "Thank God!" Others in the troupe took up the sloganeering ("I am not allowed to smoke marijuana!"; "I cannot travel without a passport!"), and before long some of the audience caught the spirit of delirious indignation. Suggesting the very violence they ordinarily abhor, the troupe then took on the hostile members of the audience

by screaming denunciations at them and (although The Living Theater is supposed to be deeply concerned with the Individual) by lumping them all together as “white liberal motherfuckers.” Rufus Collins, who can yell louder and longer than any other member of the company, really got his lungs going over the fact — not hitherto recognized as a revolutionary grievance — that “Equity is trying to keep us out!” Judith Malina then exemplified the troupe’s intelligence by shouting almost simultaneously the contradictory slogans, “Stop the killing!” and “Play guerrilla warfare!”

As always, The Living Theater rigged the evening in such a way that it would be able to view whatever happened as self-confirming. Thus one member of the troupe was careful to justify all that he might say by announcing, “The answers you hear are a reflection of *your* questions,” while another cleverly insisted, “I am here to show the hysteria of my mind; what are you going to do about it?” A few brave, naïve members of the audience tried to talk with individuals in the company, mistakenly assuming that they were interested in dialogue. For their pains one was called “Jew!” and another, the more all-encompassing and now traditional “white motherfucker!” Once in a while I felt in sympathy with the company’s rage, because several members of the audience managed to say quite incredibly stupid things. But The Living Theater does have a way of bringing out the worst in everybody — not, as they claim, to exorcise so much as to exasperate.

The exhibitionists in the audience — like those in the company — had a field day, though it was not clear in either case, what they had to exhibit. By the end of the evening, a hundred or so people were standing around on stage watching a few seminude couples have semi-sex, apparently in the conviction that anything that takes place in a group is ennobling. I, for one, was reminded of nothing so much as a very bad party: poor ventilation, lousy music, ugly people, stupid talk. A party, to be more precise, for sado-masochists.

But proof that the new theater is capable of producing significant innovations can be found in the work of The Open Theater.

The Open Theater offered two productions this season, Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Cocu*, translated by Albert Bermel, and *The Serpent: A Ceremony*, with “words and structure” by Jean-Claude van Itallie. The first seemed to me an almost total failure, the second an almost total success. Joseph Chaikin, the company’s founder and guiding genius, directed *The Serpent* but apparently had nothing to do with *Ubu Cocu* — and his presence or absence makes all the difference. Having seen

The Serpent first, and having been overwhelmed by its brilliance, I was all the more astonished at the ineptness of *Ubu Cocu*. Trivial, silly, tedious almost beyond relief in its broad, slapstick effects, its sole virtue was that it was never merely self-indulgent. But with Chaikin in command, the same company shows itself capable in *The Serpent* of extraordinary work — something very like a masterpiece.

Dedicated to values and goals similar to those of The Performance Group and The Living Theater, The Open Theater approaches them with infinitely more intelligence and skill. If the members of the company see themselves as individuals concerned with their own growth, they also see themselves as professionals who take seriously their responsibilities as performers. They know exactly what they are doing; their improvisations are within the context of agreed-upon aims, of the needs of the whole; and they are able to repeat an effect once they have created it.

The Open Theater also knows the difference between attacking an audience and challenging it. Only once did members of the company directly enter the audience's space (to retrieve apples that had been deliberately spilled into it), and that one gesture was entirely successful: it made perfect sense for audience and performers to share together the "tasting of the fruit," and the impact of direct confrontation had not been dissipated by constant usage. And unlike The Living Theater, stiff with pomposity, The Open Theater is even capable of self-mockery. Members of the troupe express not only terror, despair and anger, but also joy, humor, even meditation and thought — in other words, they attempt a range which The Living Theater never approaches.

And finally, The Open Theater has achieved that integration of words and movement, of verbal and nonverbal language, that the other groups mostly prate about. The text of *The Serpent*, witty and compressed, is beautifully counterpointed by the subtle articulations of the troupe's movements; verbal and nonverbal almost intuitively embody each other, becoming what *Village Voice* critic Ross Wetzsteon, to whom I'm heavily indebted for some of my views on The Open Theater, has aptly called "bodily emotions . . . the fusion of the physical and the spiritual." And The Open Theater does all this without the self-conscious proselytizing that characterizes The Performance Group and The Living Theater: no slogans, no polemics, no Statements of Purpose — just solid achievement.

The Serpent has its lapses: an occasional repetition, a trite gesture or phrase, a bit of attitudinizing, an unimaginative transition. But these are insignificant compared with its enormous accomplishments. The

mimed re-creation of President Kennedy's assassination makes remarkable use of the visual images of television and film, going forward and backward in time, as all of us do in our mind's eye when trying to relive that event. The scene in which five actors together portray the Serpent — limbs twisting, heads bobbing in a free yet synchronized movement — astonishingly captures that lustful, frightening, humorous creature of human mythology. And finally, preeminently, there is the stunning re-enactment of Cain's murder of his brother, Abel, in which the two men move as if controlled by a single string, terrifyingly establishing the truism about the complicity of crime. (In a touch of genius, Chaikin introduces two or three bleating "sheep" into the scene; innocent and stupid, wholly disinterested yet nonetheless affected by the fracas about them, the sheep come to epitomize nature's bland, bizarre neutrality.)

In short, The Open Theater's production of *The Serpent* is an authentic milestone, the first fully realized achievement of the new theater. Henceforth it will be an inspiration to, and a measure of, that theater's development.

Martin Duberman

AMERICA, AMERICA

Part II of a Long Poem

"FROM A NOTEBOOK – Oct. '68 – May '69"

Can't go further.
If there's to be a
second part, it's not
a going beyond, I'm
still here.

To dig down,
to re-examine.

•

Dec. '68

What is the revolution I'm driven
to name, to live in? — that now roars,
a toneless constant, now
sings itself?

It's in the air: no air
to breathe without
scent of it,
pervasive:
odor of snow,
freshwater,
stink of dank
vegetation recomposing.

(Yet crisply
the moon's risen,
full, complete.

Secret uprising (last time I looked,
surely not long since,
dark was
as complete).

The snowfields have been
taken over

(glistening crust of ice upon snow
in driftwaves, curves of stilled
wind-caress, bare to the moon
in silence of adoration).

If it were so for us!
But that's the moon's world.

•

Feb. '69

Robert reminds me *revolution*
implies the circular: an exchange
of position, the high
brought low, the low
ascending, a revolving,
an endless rolling of the wheel. The wrong word.
We use the wrong word. A new life
isn't the old life in reverse, negative of the same photo.
But it's the only
word we have . . .

•

March '69

Chuck Matthei
travels the country

a harbinger

(He's 20. His golden beard was pulled and clipped
by a Wyoming sheriff, but no doubt has grown again
though he can't grow knocked-out teeth.
He wears sneakers even in winter,
to avoid animal-hide; etc.)

and on his journeyings bears
my poem 'A Man'
to prisoners in the jails.

Of Mitch I wrote it,
even before anyone heard
the voice he
brought to song.
But Chuck has found in it

a message for all who resist war,
disdain to kill,
try to equate
'human' with 'humane.'

(And if his intransigence
brings us another despair
and we call it 'another form of aggression,'
don't we confess —
wishing he had a sense of humor —
our own extremity?)

'Living a life' the poem begins.
'— the beauty of deep lines
dug in your cheeks'
and ends,

'you pick out
your own song from the uproar,

line by line,
and at last throw back
your head and sing it.'

Next on the mimeograph follows:

'THERE IS ONLY AS MUCH PEACE AS THERE ARE PEACEFUL PEOPLE'
—A. J. Muste

Then Chuck has written:

This is your only life — live it well!

*No one man can bring about a social change —
but each man's life is a whole and necessary part of his society,
a necessary step in any change,
and a powerful example of the possibility of his way of life for
others.*

*Let all of our words and our actions speak the possibility of peace
and cooperation between men.*

Too long have we used the excuse:

*'I believe in peace, but that other man does not — when he lays
down his arms, then I will follow.'*

*Which of us deserves to wait to be the last good man on earth;
how long will we wait if all of us wait?*

*Let each man begin a one-man revolution of peace and mutual aid —
so that there is at least that much peace . . . a beginning;'* . . .

A beginning.

Where shall we

shall I

begin?

Can't go

further.

Time, says the old Canon,
in Denis Saurat's *Death and the Dreamer*,
is not a sequence,
as man's simplicity thinks, but radiates
out from a center

every direction,

all

dimensions

(pulsations, as from living cells,

radiant —

•

May 14th, 1969, Berkeley

Went with some of my students to work in the People's Park. There
seemed to be plenty of digging and gardening help so we decided,
as Jeff had his truck available, to shovel up the garbage that had
been thrown into the west part of the lot and take it out to the
city dump.

O happiness
in the sun! Is it
that simple, then,

to live?
— crazy rhythm of
scooping up barehanded
(all the shovels already in use)
careless of filth and broken glass
— scooping up garbage together
poets and dreamers studying
joy together, clearing
refuse off the neglected, newly recognized,
humbly waiting ground, place, locus, of what could be our New
World even now,
our revolution, one and one and one and one together, black
children swinging,
green guitars, that energy, that music, no one
telling anyone what to do,
everyone doing,
each leaf of
the new grass near us
a new testament . . .

Out to the dump:
acres of garbage glitter and stink in wild sunlight, gulls
float and scream in the brilliant sky,
polluted waters bob and dazzle, we laugh, our arms ache, we work
together
shoving and kicking and scraping to empty our truckload over the
bank
even though we know
the irony of adding to the Bay fill, the System has us there —
but we love each other and return to the Park.

Thursday, May 15th

At 6 a.m. the ominous zooming, war-sound, of helicopters
breaks into our sleep.

To the Park:

ringed with police.

Bulldozers have moved in.

Barely awake, the people —

those who had made for each other

a green place —
begin to gather at the corners.

Their tears fall on sidewalk cement.
The fence goes up, twice a man's height.
Everyone knows (yet no one yet
believes it) what all shall know
this day, and the days that follow:
now, the clubs, the gas,
bayonets, bullets. The War
comes home to us . . .

•

A WEEK LATER:

WHAT PEOPLE CAN DO

1. Be in the streets — they're ours!
2. Report any action you have witnessed or been involved in that should be broadcast to keep the people informed. Especially call to report the location of any large groups of people, so those people who have been separated may regroup. . . .
3. The Free Church and Oxford Hall medical aid stations need medical supplies, especially:
 - gauze pads
 - adhesive tape
 - plastic squeeze bottles.
4. PLEASE do not go to the Free Church unless you have need to.
5. Photographers and filmmakers: Contact Park Media Committee, . . .
6. Bail money will be collected at tables outside the coop grocery stores:
 - Telegraph Ave. store: Monday
 - University Ave. store: Tuesday
 - Shattuck Ave. store: Wed. & Thurs.
7. BRING YOUR KITE AND FLY IT. Use nylon strings. Fly it when you are with a crowd. A helicopter cannot fly too near flying kites.
8. Be your brothers' and sisters' keeper.
9. Take care.

*'change is now
change is now
things that seem to be solid are not'*

The words came through, transistor
turned up loud. The music, the beat,
lost now, but
the words hang on.

Revolution: a crown of tree

raises itself out of the heavy
flood.

A branch lifts
under null skies' weight
pushes against
walls of air, flashing
clefts in it.

The floodwaters
stir, mud
swirls to the surface.

A hand, arm,
lifts in the crawl —
hands, arms, intricate
upflashing —
a sea full of swimmers!
their faces' quick steady
lift for air —

Maybe what seems
evanescent is solid.

Islands
step out of the waves on rock feet.

Denise Levertov

THREE

Sweet, sad
nostalgia —
walking

by on the
beach a
kid in two

piece bathing
suit of awful
color, girl

with small
breasts, furtive,
half-terrified

a man who
might have been
screaming, a

woman more
lush, huge somewhat
fallen

breasts. Waves
coming in as
the tide

goes out, either York Beach,
Maine,
1937 or else

waking, kicking at
the water, the
sand between my toes.

•

Let me see what you're looking at,
behind you, up close, my head pressed

against you, let me look at what
it is you are seeing, all by yourself.

•

Echoes — what
air trembles to
sound out like
waves one watches.

Robert Creeley

CHEZ MAX

Speaking of substance and shadow, what is
the matter? The table-wine is vile
and it doesn't matter, we keep on
drinking ourselves into indolent satiety or
sudden precise sobriety clapping its fists
at our temples the hard-rock horror of
electric snow cold sweat sweet mêlée
of bridges and tunnels disseminating blood-
bondage, gathering up all the bone-sherds
of my poor shattered neo-American head.

The moment it hits as it is not
god sees imploding perfectest agony.

But to speak of that is . . .

Here in the tower, underfoot, look! out there
the sky, the evident sky, the exemplary
silky innocent cloud-scant sky
is sensibly blue and inarticulately
immaculately conceived like
celanese parachutes we drop out of the sky in
in falling out on the far side of the division
of love's labours lost or, misapprehended, we are
made out to be the first post-literate generation, *in
transit* with no direction home or without a home
beyond the palindrome . . . and,
well, and I guess that I just don't know
and I guess that I just don't know
if this is *de facto* where it's at, there being
nowhere else to go.

Hence: loathéd melancholy strikes again
as coming down I seem to see you
drift nonchalantly into the dream I keep dreaming
where you are leaving and leaving me, my

fingers at your cheek, my lips at your ear
whispering the story of my hand on the surface of a lake
three inches deep: the tympanum of experience
is struck by this.

And by these things shall ye know him: "Un homme
ne peut se sauver seul" she said.
His true Penelope was Dylan.

And however you look at it it's all the same to me:
the insane sound of the sky
falling in fourths and fifths; the lucid
intervals of silent portage, back and forth
across the rock-slides, iced-teas, heaths,
the leafless paramos of paradox, to paramount
my Lady's exchequer of Vogue, her Currency. . . .

Up to the minute of my latest death
I tried governing my passions. It was
useless: I succeeded only in opening and closing
like a valve or a valence. Values were
verdicts; death was everywhere
apparent and voluptuous.

Now and now it is true and blue, now
it is true and it is blue, Miss Stein and
Mr. Stevens suggest to me; but if it is red
like Philosophy's Table, and false
like lying, what is the matter
and why is trying?

What is the matter; why *is* trying.
In the nursery the love-children are crying.
On the record, Lady sings the blues, dying . . .

and in my grandmother's parlour games are being played
forever, like . . . charades, perhaps: acting out
with pre-Freudian largesse of innocent pleasure
the dream-pantomimes of an age thriving and

dwindling down to a point in time, a point

a point at which there is known to have occurred
an explosion, and at the infinite specificness of which
the mind boggles.

But my family are still playing at games
unto the third and fourth generations of them
that hate me; and how am I to gamble at passion
if the lines of your body blur as I come closer?
Far as the eye can see the mind can touch
the prosaic bodice, the upper half of truth;
the naked sex beneath belies your bastard bravery:
the "Agape of the Cross" defies your inquiry.
Love remains a mystery.

I mean, the nineteenth century is just beginning
to be history. All the wars are all over
going on all around us, scattering us like chaff
uncharitably on the chequered fields of dogma,
gathering us up in a husky ecstasy of doubt.

And how *does* it feel to be one of the beautiful people?
and how should I ever dissever the blood/brain barrier
as wildfire stars are raked across my sky
while shadows feed me pills and try to kiss me?

And I am dancing and something like rage or
terror holds me breathless at the point of total
collapse or total recall, and I am laughing
and am beginning to fluoresce, to light up, to come
in colors, when, suddenly everywhere
wildflowers bloom and burst in the insane migraine moraine

over which the bridge between my life and me
suspends itself serene itself suspends.

Jeffrey Apter

REVISED STANDARD

This we have lost:

free will, the *a priori*.

We cannot say an hour
the sun stood still,
sing Glory.

Yet our fathers are kept alive
in us all.

By insulated entrails
Belzhazzar computes.

We are reluctant to die.
Men for governments and good causes
keep count

Ezekial shoots the sky.

So what if only nuns and Baptists
believe in miraculous birth

we have not lost our fathers.

They are with us always in love
to the end of the earth.

Miller Williams

THIS SPRING, SEE THE FORGIVENESS OF ASIAN FLOWERS

That the flowers will keep on growing this Spring in America —
And it seems they will —
Shows that flowers are the most forgiving things in the growing
kingdom —
Which includes so much.
There! the leaders of America
Kill in Asia — a wonderful place for flowers —
And flowers, living, will grow here too as if there was nothing
to notice.
The kinship of American flowers with Asian flowers
Is one of the longest, truest, deepest, lovingest
Havings-to-do-with of things like each other, but in a different
place.
— Wonder of wonder, the Asian flowers — there are many elsewhere
than where American leaders killed and kept on doing this —
These Asian flowers
Feel it is all right for American flowers to grow this Spring.
This Spring, then,
We shall see American flowers grow;
And the forgiveness of Asian flowers.

Eli Siegel

PHILIP RAHV

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MELTING POT

SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME

My membership in the Faculty Senate at the City College of New York. This was to be a ceremonial function. Only three times a year, the chairman insisted as he put my name down for nomination. "You want some power in this place?"

There and then I should have known that fatal and bizarre contradictions would be contained in this seat. The Faculty Senate was the culmination of a long struggle by the liberals at City College to gain some power from an educational conservative, its president, Buell Gallagher. Yet any schoolchild knows that the budget is the source of legislative power. An assembly without power to levy is straw, hollow men. And a thousand other councils, committees, at City are jealous of their academic power. The Senate only recommends. Yet when the thunderclap of Black Power burst over City College where were you, O Judicial councils, oh Faculty committees, oh deans? The Faculty Senate, hungry for something to do, alone, sat out in the open.

A perfect heath, forum, for dramatic effects, which is what much of the dreadful *pudder* over City was. No condescension here. Drama overwhelms reality. Drama overwhelms budgets, duly elected officials, democratic process, good sense. Drama releases terror, guilt; and as I walked down Convent Avenue, passed the locked gates of the campus seized by the Black and Puerto Rican students, saw two handsome freshmen, one standing to the right of the gate on top of its concrete parapet, upholding a flag of Black Nationalism in the best Iwo Jima style, a Puerto Rican on the other side, with defiant eyes sweeping the horizon, the standard of Puerto Rico a spear in his arms, the T.V. unit perched only a few hundred yards away, waiting to sweep down for the shot, I realized that issues would be secondary to the sheer joy of a good grade B movie. And not to be unfair to students, weeks later the invisible cameras were still grinding in the mind's eye when the Senate Investigating Committee threatened us and the grey-haired Civil Service nonentities rose on the Faculty Senate floor to declaim about the beauty of America, how proud they were, our fruitful land, how willing to

cooperate in the clear and deliberate scrutiny of Southern Senators into New York City's racial problems.

Rising to the podium for my maiden speech, a veteran actor, myself, a member of Equity, I found my voice shaking uncontrollably, anger, rage, wagging my tongue. I shouted, held back tears of emotion, my words bubbling on about our responsibility, educational reform, too long, etc., and sat down not sure what had happened, to mild applause.

Thereafter I was stamped as a left-leaning liberal although my sarcastic remarks in the back of the Senate must have made me suspect to several bearded colleagues. I must confess that I almost always agreed with the conservative position. It seemed to me crazy to turn City College willy-nilly into a Junior College. It was bad enough already but to introduce 60 or 50 percent disadvantaged students without any real preparation for them would overwhelm what fragile standards existed. Constitutionally however, in both senses, I was incapable of voting against any radical proposal from the left. The style, imagination, speech, of the Right was so woeful and second-rate that it was just impossible to raise your hand and vote with them. They were boring and no matter how silly my fellow left-wing Senators were, it was my kind of silliness, my human sympathy was with them just as it was with the Black students who alternately pleaded and ranted at us. It was clear whom I loved, whom I had to vote for even if it should cost us a College. Every night on the way back to East 13th Street, my home, another professor from the English Department and I would berate the nincompoop actions of our friends; the next day, we would support them, nay we would rise, shaking with pale anger to defend them, the cause greater than ourselves.

We were a whole college of fools. At first, a spirit of rational irony prevailed. The seizing of the City College gates, the lockout on the South Campus, the closing of the school, all borrowed the holiday air of an April vacation, a lark, just a school holiday. I had come creeping down the sidewalk along the South Campus after my first Senate meeting toward the main gate, unable to resist a peek. There were several of my students, Black, just coming out by coincidence and I waved timidly, as if to signal, if you don't want to know me, it's all right. I got a big hello, however, and exchanging grins, we began to walk along discussing the occupation. There were several points of view. Some felt that the whole occupation was a mistake, that Gallagher should have called the police in immediately, now that it was a fact however they felt duty bound to support it. There was a lot of cynical laughing at some of the goings-on and even among those who supported the seizing I sensed a good-humored perspective on the situation.

Two weeks later, after the burning of the buildings, the physical attacks on each other by whites and Blacks, all the irony and perspective were gone. A Negro student who had elegantly dismissed the Black Power leaders in the privacy of my office rushed up as I was standing outside the Senate and warned with blazing eyes that the school would have to be shut, the demands acquiesced to, or there would be guerrilla warfare. What had happened? Foolery had turned into madness. When the music building went up in flames, the fires of rage that were smoldering in Black and white breasts burst out, the campus was in the hands of incendiaries suddenly, people hitting each other with sticks, stones, even the kids from SDS were caught off guard. I saw them staring in confusion as a huge backlash crowd of white students pushed back through the gates of the South Campus to keep it open, shouting a welcome to the arriving police cars, applauding the cops. Yet even at the height of the tension, Black and white were mingling in the crowd, politely elbowing each other to get a better look at what was going on. A peculiar hysteria reigned. There were secondhand reports everywhere of verbal atrocities committed. A hysterical female student of mine, Jewish, called to insist I do something. (I suspect it was to rush over to her Bronx house and give her a hug.) *They* had beaten up a friend of a friend of hers, shouting, "Hitler didn't get enough of you!" Now while it was true that some of the Black students resented those paramilitary geniuses, the Jewish Defense League, making themselves the chaperones of City College, as I wound through the crowds day after day I found no animosity to my big Semite beak. There was plenty of obscenity on the floor of the Senate but no snide or nasty remarks about Jews. The apocrypha of horror, however, buzzed in my ear. Jews share with Blacks a paranoid vision of the world, amply justified in both by history.

Yet something ugly was in the air at the college. If it was a mass therapy session, the feelings exposed were truly unpleasant. All over the campus Blacks and whites were talking, trying to understand one another but the burning smoke of the music building was an acrid taste in every mouth. I met my classes in the following weeks with a sick feeling in my stomach, somehow the compact between members of the College had been broken. Everyone sat uneasily. Attendance was not just irregular; it was desultory. Students would come in, try to listen, then just get nauseous, sinking down into their chairs, collapsed, their faces hopeless. The whole of the College seemed like a mental ward. A team of psychiatrists, not teachers, was in order.

Sixty percent disadvantaged versus 40 percent competitive seemed

absurd as a demand. It would destroy City College's pretensions to academic excellence and assure it a fate as a Junior College. Why effectively destroy the institution? Were the Black students being silly? Was it merely a ploy — make an unacceptable demand then bargain for an acceptable one?

From the passion with which the demand was stated I believe that once aroused to a sense of what the Black community was suffering in its high schools, how bad the education was, how many of their fellow Negroes were flunking or dropping out, a rage deep and terrible seized these students. It was a song like "Freedom Now" yes, "Education Now" not later, not tomorrow. America had been promising that for too long, now, now. Why not? This wasn't money, welfare, handout, this was opportunity. How could America deny any black man opportunity after its vicious record of exploitation. It wasn't 60/40 that was outrageous. It was the voice of the rational, friendly educator counseling them to leave another generation in the desert.

But how could City College alone shoulder the burden of this opportunity, it belonged to the whole country? How could middle-class America make snide remarks about welfare and pinch pennies on education? Oh this suicidal country, oh poor City College, oh poor Buell Gallagher who presided over mediocre building programs, mediocre departments, mediocre planning. No wonder he was eager to lock the gates. Frankly everyone was ready for an uprising.

This was another hidden spring of irony running treacherously through the conflict. Many of the whites were boiling with outrage too. Faculty who saw in the revolution a chance to change City College. One of the saddest estrangements was between liberals who genuinely wanted to change the education at City but felt that the Black demands would make a farce out of "quality" education.

Now we come to the horrible joke which was assented to by the Senate. One lonely man from the School of Education rose again and again trying to give some background on the implications of 60/40, 50/50, 40/60. What programs would we institute? What programs had been tried elsewhere? Again and again he was ruled out of order. The Chair and the Senate, that band of educators, did not want to hear about education. They wanted to debate power, rights. We were playing Supreme Court, President, Congress. We were setting precedents, defining law, saving the College, the U.S. We discussed everything but what disadvantaged kids could do and what we might be able to do for them. The gavel came right down on any mention of this.

Frankly, it was impossible for most of us to talk about education.

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My paranoid intuition sensed that what the Blacks were calling for was not 100 places more in the Freshman class, or a 50/50 split, but an admission of shame on the part of the white faculty and student body. I felt as if I was the victim of a Negro inquisition or, if you like, of a Black tribunal where cast in the role of Adolf Eichmann I was forced to examine myself as a willing cog in a vicious system. No man is free of the guilt of his society and as several Black leaders were blind with righteous indignation I was soon walking around shaking with fear and anger. I'm a Jew, I mumbled to myself. I have my own rights to reparations. My father's family, 400 strong, was dead in Nazi gas chambers. I had doors slammed in my face in Protestant Wellesley as an adolescent. Angry WASP fathers pulled the telephones out of the wall when I tried to date their daughters. Why should I have to bear responsibility for white America?

Yet it was true that my sainted mother dying in a hospital bed had whispered ironically to a visiting neighbor who buzzed about my non-Jewish girlfriend, "At least she's not black." My mother, who propped up in front of the T.V. watching the riots after Martin Luther King's death, had whispered to us that when she got well she wanted to help the Blacks. O we Jews are just as sick, confused, culpable, in this dreadful condescension to the African as the rest of the U.S. All right, I'm guilty! I wanted to shout. Tell me what I owe. Let's get it over with and get back to being human beings. And then again, what good was it to my Negro students if I lost my self-esteem, if I cringed before statements I thought were stupid, if I flattered mistakes? Wasn't this condescension too? My head banged with questions and I didn't feel like teaching anything. After a few seconds of the solemn rational discussion in the Senate I began itching in my seat. I wanted a religious happening not a debate, catharsis not constitutional procedure.

Nor did the Senate, despite the self-congratulation of its report, ". . . in contrast to most academic institutions in the nation . . . the City College Faculty Senate refused to be stampeded into hasty decision-making," move in a deliberate fashion. It swung Left, then Right. At first its members were in a conservative mood. As the chamber began to feel the pressure of events, President Gallagher's resignation, injunctions to open the school, violence, burning buildings outside, the atmosphere changed. It was impossible to preserve a starched self-righteous front with the din of fire engines and police sirens echoing in the street outside. The room was invaded by student delegations, community leaders, crackpots. One boy grabbed the rostrum and flashed a swastika he claimed was being flaunted everywhere. Black preachers

rose, declaiming poetry in grand seventeenth-century tropes but with the passion of Faulknerian revivalists. It brought tears to the eyes of the Speech Department which was converted en masse. The rest of us sat blinking not knowing what was going on. A woman who lived down the street jumped up at one point to shout that we better vote fast. "I just dispersed a crowd down at the subway station that's getting fed up with you and was going to march up and burn this place down." We Senators began to get nervous, especially those who had to take the subway. Had the votes been forced in the first few weeks of sitting, it is more than probable that the 50/50 plan would have passed. After all, negotiators who had been clearly nominated for their conservative position endorsed it. It seemed as if anyone who talked at length with the Black leaders was infected with their zeal and became a missionary for the demands. However, the politics of New York City, the newspapers, began to exert a counterpressure. Inevitably the votes swung back to the right. It was possible to get only a few places more for admission than had been authorized at the very beginning of the Senate meetings. The Black Studies Program was sent to the deep freeze of a commission. A Black Freshman Orientation was approved but this was a foregone conclusion and the original proposal which made its director almost independent, responsible solely to Black students, was reworded so that he came more strictly under the jurisdiction of the Administration.

Dazed, bewildered by the endless bickering in the Senate over *Robert's Rules of Order*, I tried to collect my students as the College moved back into classes for the last few weeks of the term. Writing does not necessarily suffer from lack of scheduled lectures and as usual papers flooded in at the last moment. In one of the final sessions I was talking about an Ellison short story, "Battle Royal," the first chapter of *Invisible Man*. I mentioned several folk tales, "Ole Massa & the Bear," "Sis Goose," which seemed pertinent to the bitter humor of Ellison and asked if they had read or knew any of the stories. The Black students were especially curious and I promised to bring the tales in. I had read them aloud before, delighting as an actor in imitating the high and low pipes of rural Southern dialect but now, standing before my students, feeling the explosive anger of American Blacks at white condescension, I began to shake. I looked down at two Black girls in the front row, and asked, my voice trembling, "Is it all right if I read it in dialect?"

"Why do you have to ask permission?"

So I read, the class laughing as I took on the comic Black voices, tears coming up, unavoidable in my eyes.

* * *

Lo, behold, in the last days of the Senate, a gift arrived from the Heavens. That noble scarecrow, *The Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations* of the United States Senate, issued a subpoena requiring City College to supply information about particular student organizations and their faculty advisors. This gave the Center and Left a chance to bristle together with common outrage. It was an old battle, a glorious one, long since won, a shiver from the fifties and as the votes rolled in to resist the subpoena, a kind of warm camaraderie spread through the ranks of our Senate. If only the Permanent Subcommittee would keep at it. We might all win together, happily, in a simple, black and white, cause.

Mark J. Mirsky

SONS AND LOVERS

PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT. By Philip Roth. Random House. \$6.95.

1

Long before *Portnoy's Complaint* was published, "Whacking Off" and "Cunt Crazy" threatened to do in *The Evergreen Review*, Sophie Ginsky took over as Ur-Jewishmother, Jack Portnoy's monolithic constipation became a subject of national concern. *Life*, which wholly owns subsidiaries like Little, Brown, permitted Albert Goldman to discuss the real Philip Roth, a small business and wholly-owned subsidiary of Random House, a wholly-owned subsidiary of *Life's* communications opposition, RCA. Advance sales were fabulous, paperback rights and movie rights astronomical, exactly the sort of thing the executors of the New York Protocols of Zion (Lit. Div.) could do once they set their minds to it. Not that *goyim* were the only ones made paranoid by *Portnoy's Complaint*: the usual Jewish response to Roth turned up again — Roth had blackened the Jewish community's third eye.

Reviews were enthusiastic, but sometimes peculiar. *Saturday Review* published Granville Hicks's good gray "yes" countered by Marya Mannes' suffragetic "Nay!" Woman, said Miss Mannes, "gets the short end of the stick even if she gets the long end of the antihero," an anatomical conception I'm still doing my best to diagram. Not only

does Portnoy "sit on life's toilet seat; he examines, lovingly, the bowl beneath," added Miss Mannes, clearly either too nice a person or insufficiently liberated a woman to mention shit.

Her review tied Brendan Gill's (in the *New Yorker*), which said *Portnoy's Complaint* was "one of the dirtiest books ever published," described its hero as a "hooknosed, Brillo-haired Punchinello . . . swaddled in polymorphous perversity," who pratfalls "into scatological hyperbole" (it sounds great with a W. C. Fields accent). Gill faint-praised Roth for his "coprophilous earthiness," quoted Pope, Whitman, Wallace Stevens, Yeats, Patrick Kavanaugh, discussed Twain, Tennyson, Mailer, Joyce, etc., trying valiantly, I think, to hide the fact that the guy who was supposed to write the review blew town. *The New York Times Book Review*, following its policy (as a friend of mine has it) of even if-a-chihuahua-writes-a-book-find-another-chihuahua-to-review-it, matched Roth with Josh Greenfield, who wrote a choke piece which said, among other things, that though the novel was possibly a masterpiece (by which he means, it seems, *Catcher in the Rye*), it "could still be nothing more than a cul-de-sac." Greenfield found the book entertaining and funny, but too much hung up on guilt: "it is only by moving beyond guilt, to the problems and turf implicit in adult independence and sovereignty, that any literature — or genre — can hope to begin to approach maturity," Greenfield actually said, which, I trust, is exactly what Sophie Ginsky herself would say on the same subject, given a course or two at the New School, or a couple of hours with Bettelheim. *Harper's*, following, perhaps, a policy of if-a-chihuahua-writes-a-book-get-an-anti-chihuahua-to-review-it, popped up Kingsley Amis who once wrote a funny book and has been funny on a large number of serious subjects ever since. Amis obliged wit ha fine set piece (item eleven or twelve on *The New York Review Chihuahua Lecture Circuit*) — you know the Waugh-in-Hollywood one that goes "isn't it nice Americans and Jews and Roth write er ah books, fiction, prose, that sort of thing?"

In *The New York Review* itself Alfred Kazin, while finding *Portnoy's Complaint* terribly funny, and Roth a gifted mimic, argued that "it is Roth's case in the essential that he can write of Jews only as hysterics," and put the book down as "the latest and most vivid example of a tendency among American Jews to reduce their experience to psychology." Kazin disapproved of Roth substituting his own "redoubtable intellectual will for the give-and-take of life" and "for the complexity and moral depth of Jewish experience, which may look reducible to a mother, a son, a shriek, a cry — but if it were, would as a subject

have been exhausted long ago." A similar process of reduction *Time's* reviewer described — without disapproval — as the transformation of Roth's "characters into super-stereotypes." *Portnoy's Complaint*, in his view, "is a work of farce that exaggerates and then destroys its content leaving a gaping emptiness," and though "sex, psychoanalysis and Jewishness form the content of the novel, they are not its subject. The book is about absurdity."

2

One difficulty in *Portnoy's Complaint* was the anticipation set up by the episodes published earlier in *PR*, *Esquire*, *New American Review*. These were, on the whole, so outrageously funny, so wild, so explosive, that their enclosure in an agony came as something of a shock, if not a sell-out. The novel forced on the reader a doubletake; everything that seemed terribly funny was still funny, but Alexander Portnoy himself was something else. The episodes were a howl the way Harpo Marx was a howl, but the book was the howl of Alexander Portnoy, a "pure howl" that culminates in the death shriek of a kid playing "they got me."

The psychoanalytical form was itself tricky. A patient goes to his analyst not just to howl. He dreams of changing his life, doing something different — a *t'shoovoh*, a turning, is called for. But Portnoy's analyst, Spielvogel, is something very special. The transaction between patient and doctor is minimal, and quite irrelevant. What's important is Portnoy's complaint, which is his real complaint — not his mother or father or the Jews: he is an Ancient Mariner of patients, and would as soon light on Spielvogel as on anyone else. "I hear myself indulging in . . . ritualized bellyaching," he says, but doesn't, of course, stop. Portnoy is the kind of guy who can go to his analyst nine to five six days a week for years, reach the end of his tale — like the Jews with their Torah — and, without a break, start all over again; which, in short, describes the form of the novel. It is a continuous tape, all one voice till Roth's punch line sets the tape back to counter 1.

Roth has brilliantly *made* something out of the psychoanalytic transaction: his patient is full of American metaphors, the secret languages of baseball, radio, even insurance; his analyst is a German Jew totally uncomprehending of his patient's pastoral reverberations. Who is this Duke Snider whose ease and mastery sum up what Portnoy wants and can't have? What was that great thing Al Gionfriddo did? What thrill is locked up in a single name, Eddie Waitkus? The psychoanalytical exchange becomes the sum of hopelessness. But this, of course, is how it began: "That's what I need most," Portnoy explains, "to howl," but

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the howl is a literary bust out. It explains the noise and shrieking, springs the imagination from the ballast bags of time, order and coherence. The psychoanalytic monologue sweeps away all limits — if you can't tell your own personal private psychoanalyst about mama's menstruation, papa's *schlang*, the wrinkles in his balls, the tickle in the wee-wee, dropping a load into a sock, jerking off on the 107 bus from New York, who's on whom in an *à trois*, what The Monkey's finger is doing under the table, who, for godssake, *can* you tell?

Spiegelvogel, then, humanizes the soliloquy, gives it focus. In his ranting, Portnoy sometimes screams "Mother!" in such a way as to effect instant transference, but confounds the issue still further by shouting, "Doctor, Your Honor, whatever your name is," mocking the possibilities: "What years of confusion! And when will they be over? Can you give me a tentative date, please? When will I be cured of what I've got!"

Psychoanalysis is in its own way Portnoy's complaint, merely one more form of time-deferral which keeps him "still hoping, you see, still if-onlying, at the age of thirty-three." Huck Finn, thirty-three and going on sixty, is up the new American creek without a raft: Huck at thirty-three is a Kafka character writing his "Letter to My Pap," or the one at the end of "The Judgment," who jumps off a bridge crying "Mother and father, I have always loved you!"

Portnoy's Complaint, consequently, devastates psychoanalysis, and, doing so, beats up on the possibilities of all understanding. During the course of his monologue Portnoy is able to name all the sins, set everything in order, lay blame where he wants it (wrongly and irrelevantly, perhaps), reach a lovely state of understanding, and still be, by life's tough standards, hopeless.

Children should be playing on this earth who look like me! *Why not?* Why should every *shtunk* with a picture window and a carport have offspring, and not me? It don't make sense! Think of it. half the race is over, and I still stand here at the starting line — me, the first one out of his swaddling clothes and into his track suit! a hundred and fifty-eight points of I.Q. and still arguing with the authorities about the rules and regulations! disputing the course to be run! calling into question the legitimacy of the track commission!

What Portnoy laments is his existential unbirth. He is doomed, as he himself keeps telling us, to be no more than a Kafkaesque "elderly bachelor."

3

The bad fairy of *Portnoy's Complaint*, as everyone knows by now, is Sophie "Red" Ginsky Portnoy, except that after Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Hiroshima, Vietnam, Roth has a little trouble convincing us the Jewish mother is the moral equivalent of war. But that is exactly what the *shrying* is about. With a mother like his, Portnoy has no time for history, for the massive complexities of his world. He knows he should — he knows, he knows — but knowing only makes not-doing worse — so we're back where we began. Lamenting his powerlessness, Portnoy accounts for it, which reassures him so he may lament the louder. The violence of his complaint *creates* the power in his mother, locks him into her system, traps him in her generation: "I am impaled again upon the long ago," he concedes, "what was, what will never be." It can't end, his "endless childhood! Which I won't relinquish — or which won't relinquish me!"

Thus Sophie is, like Spielvogel, only a necessary prop. Portnoy's paralysis can't do without her. Political oppressors are different: one lashes out at them to expose the nature of the tyrant and the torture, with an end — to effect change. Psychological oppressors are part of the *in-system*, part of the same (mathematical) set as the patient. They oppress but at the same time provide a comforting causality. A political oppressor may die or be killed; a psychological oppressor dies but never fades away.

"Doctor," Portnoy shrieks at his usual decibel level, "my psyche, it's about as difficult to understand as a grade-school primer! . . . Who needs *Freud*? Rose Franzblau of the *New York Post* has enough on the ball to come up with an analysis of somebody like me!" Portnoy himself has enough on the ball, so in the novel he does his own psychological processing.

Causes: Mama, Papa, the Jews.

Effect: Portnoy.

His "one hundred and fifty-eight points of I.Q." are temporarily filed away so a whiz bang determinism can be accepted as the whole truth. The guy whose mind would reject out of hand the simplistic determinisms — historical, Marxian, Darwinian, Freudian — locks into an etiology simple as pie. A recent convert, this boyish St. Paul comes from Antioch to write his *Epistle to the Goyim*. What does he expect but gratitude for his free dissemination of inner temple secrets? That's not what he gets. To the Gentiles new St. Paul is just old Saul (of Tarsus) Malamud — "hooknosed, Brillo-haired," how does *that* grab you, *bubi*?

4

In parts of the novel one hopes Roth is either being ironic, or putting us rather than himself on. Take the contradiction at the heart of *Portnoy's Complaint* — Portnoy angrily raging in a Freudian tale with an ostensible happy ending. Programmed by Sophie he could have become a little “fruitcake,” a fussy hand-on-hip Fire Islander — “how I made it into the world of pussy at all,” he marvels, “that’s the mystery.” Yet cunt-craziness doesn’t stop a guy thirty-three from beating his meat, or howling about his mother or soliciting a psychoanalyst. Portnoy’s prosecutor’s brief accuses Sophie Doe and Jack Doe and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob Doe of some terrible though not quite specified crime — much out of keeping with happy endings. His own simplemindedness can’t resolve the contradiction, but may, perhaps, explain it.

Portnoy unconsciously seems to recognize that his whacking off and cunt-craziness are one and the same thing. Cunt-craziness is masturbation graduated into a softer, wetter, warmer medium. Of course whacking off with live pussy beats the room temperature liver Portnoy once used, or even Sophie’s highest-grade (but refrigerated) meat! Artistically, too, a real live genuine talking pussy puts his own fake girl-voice to shame, or his ventriloquized dialogue begging “Big Boy” to give it to *her*, a bra fished out of the dirty laundry! Compared with “The Brassiere,” “The Monkey” is fabulous, with speech self-generated, capable — both orally *and* vaginally! — of carrying masturbation to its miraculous only-dreamed-of no-hands pitch.

It’s when “The Monkey” tries to become more than a masturbation medium that she’s banished. She has broken the secret rule which forbids a woman making greater claim on Portnoy than his dong makes (that is, no claim at all). Whacking off and cunt-craziness offer unlimited larks, no more. As a medium, as a function of Portnoy, “The Monkey” has total freedom; as a woman, as a human, none.

This, of course, is the unmentioned crime somebody must be blamed for. This, of course, is why and what Spielvogel must be told.

5

On quite another level Portnoy’s simplemindedness may be only Roth’s tyranny — over his characters, over their situations. In *Portnoy*, Roth’s triumphant *stylistic* liberation, old sophisticated forms of psychological and sociological rigidity reappear. Roth still refuses to let go: anyone who speaks a certain way, dresses a certain way, *must* act a certain way. Sophie Portnoy is not allowed to be a Jewish mother but only Alex’s very own Jewish mother, a wholly possessed and monopolized

subsidiary — not sister Hannah's mother, not "girl," not "wife," not "daughter." The one flash of Sophie in pre-Alexandrian freedom — as "Red" Ginsky in the high school yearbook — startles us as much as it startles Portnoy. Otherwise she is all his. His system needs her. Lamenting imprisonment in her world, he tightly locks her into his, that nice interdependency of tyrant and tyrannized Birdwhistell calls "graymail," which allows the two parties in a suffering compact interchangeable roles.

But since Alex is paying, this is *his* show, prime uninterrupted time in Spielvogel's Non-Directive Living Theater, performing Oedipal farce.

Perhaps Portnoy's high I.Q. is buried here too, or perhaps Roth himself is pushing a little. Farce could be unnecessary; Oedipus himself might be of little help. In the Cousin Heshie episode a way out of the Freudian trap is indicated, and raged against — powerful Cousin Heshie wrestled his father and could have whupped him — *why didn't he!* In his tale which mocks Freudian hope, Portnoy the innocent falls victim to its central Oedipal myth, which Heshie's refusal dramatically rejects: it is not *necessary* for sons to kill their fathers. It's not even necessary for Jack Portnoy to kick his wife in the ass. According to the Oedipus rule he *must*, but in the wider world of imaginative possibility, *who says so?*

The tyranny and fanaticism doesn't stop with Heshie and his father wrestling. St. Paul has been saving his ultimate revelation, about what kind of people Jews *really* are.

When Heshie was killed in the war, the *only* [my italics in print but not in emphasis] thing people could think to say to my Aunt Clara and my Uncle Hymie, to somehow mitigate the horror, to somehow console them in their grief, was "At least he didn't leave you with a *shikse* wife. At least he didn't leave you with *goyische* children."

Not one word about the *nachess* Heshie gave when he was alive, you see: even this cliché of clichés is denied the sons-of-bitches by the brilliant prosecuting attorney. But then fanatics are notoriously bad reporters.

6

Beyond parents, beyond the Jews, the quality of American day-to-day existence — the *actually* ordinary represented by Jack Portnoy's constipation, Sophie's housekeeping, jobs, money, education, failure, success — invites Roth's and Portnoy's rage. The *seemingly* ordinary occupies a book like *Lolita*; one passes through the distorted American

looking glass and finds a fantastic world on the other side. Roth's American Scream rages against a mirror one crashes through only to meet the same old stuff beyond it, the hideous physical and psychological reality from which there seems to be no escape. In *Lolita* the ordinary turns magical and wild; in *Portnoy* the small boy's magical world of peaches floating in jello ends in a boring plodding routine reality only Roth's magnificent stylistic bust out can overcome.

The novel opens quietly, echoing Proust: the lyric wonder of that delightful small boy contemplating his mother's ubiquity and mystery. This gentle opening becomes a metaphor for the pastoral quiet and cut-out the adult Portnoy wants again. The steam bath (where there are neither women nor *goyim*) has it, and center field has it even more — a great wide Huck Finn river of a field where a guy can claim fly balls easily and gracefully merely by calling "It's mine." Whacking off has it, and pussy-eating when the girl doesn't follow on with talk of marriage. Most of all, the session with Doctor Spielvogel has it, one long stretch of experience "all mine."

The rest is din and shouting, screams, shrieks, pounding on bathroom doors, threats, accusations, blame and counterblame. That ubiquitous lady so magic with jello turns in a twinkling from good fairy to bad. What is she doing to "the little overearnest innocent endlessly in search of the key to that unfathomable mystery, his mother's approbation"? Sitting over her with a knife to make him eat, isn't *that* the moral equivalent of war? Or somebody pounding the locked bathroom door while Alex heroically tries to do his thing?

Pow! Pow! There's for Sophie! Pow Pow! Again! Two feet and two fists stuck in Tar Baby — that's the structure of the novel, with Portnoy the *shnook* poised for one last suicidal butt. Tar Baby, "Jewish Mother," it's all one. Simpleminded causalities need simpleminded causes. Do sweet-faced little Christian boys whose mothers speak softly and carry watercress sandwiches, do such male children pull their dongs lickety-split *efsher*? Should the protean cock itself maybe get a little credit in the masturbation Olympics? Perhaps it, as *Lear's* Edmund might have suggested, would provide incentives no matter what stars presided in heaven when Alexander Portnoy was born, no matter what the Jews were up to, or Sophie Ginsky. Narcissus' mother, as far as we know, wasn't Jewish. Nor, for that matter, was Jocasta.

What is Spielvogel to do about simplemindedness? Screaming about absurdity, Portnoy doesn't believe in it. Like Josef K he adds up only objective facts. But why, in an absurd world, should a high I.Q., a college degree, good looks, style, wit and an important job be any

greater guarantee of existential realization than Joseph K's hopeless bicycle licence? Portnoy's old man has this great *schlang* and a great pair of balls and for this the reward is constipation? How can a man stuff his *shikseh* secretary and not make top-banana in the world writ large? And more: if Portnoy *believed* the world was absurd would he think it at all extraordinary for a guy to get gunned down for tearing a label off a piece of public property? At the end of the novel he's still Hucking it, Jewish Version — like those other guys turned by novelistic time into drags — Tommy Wilhelm of *Seize the Day*, Herzog, Levin of Malamud's *A New Life*.

Mama Tar Baby has clearly won.

The moral? Sophie's naturally: it's O.K. for a fairy goy like Peter Pan not to grow up, but a New Jersey Jewish college graduate of thirty-three?

7

Any qualms one might have about *Portnoy* the novel don't at all apply to Roth's writing. The book has it all. The fury in Alex's howl contains no trace of the whining found in earlier Roth, or in those Jewish poor Dogsbody's of Bellow and Malamud. Portnoy's shouting colloquial voice carries everything with it. A terribly gifted writer is working at the top of his bent.

. . . [H]ere in a Turkish bath . . . we enter a dark quiet region redolent of wintergreen. The sounds are of a tiny, unenthusiastic audience applauding the death scene in some tragedy: it is the two masseurs wallowing and potching at the flesh of their victims. . . . [T]he place speaks to me of prehistoric times . . . when above the oozing bog that was the earth . . . swirling white gasses choked out the sunlight . . . a time of amphibious creatures, plunging brainless hulking things, with wet meaty flanks and steaming torsos. . . .

The pitch of excitement and humor is everywhere. Exclamation points, italics, uppercase shrieking, everything belongs, everything moves. Two, four, ten levels of narrative going at once, each with its clarity, its wholeness, all subject to the myth — whatever Portnoy discloses *has to be* psychologically relevant. The transparent unhappily turns opaque the moment Portnoy passes from anecdote to his Ancient Mariner fix, but this, *stylistically*, adds dimension to the book.

Every break into the flow of detail — in order to explain to Spielvogel, or ask his help — changes Portnoy's simple tale into a warped (and woofed) irony: in a beautiful rewriting of the Duchess's "red

shoes" episode in Proust, Portnoy sends his father off in a cab and hears him cry out "What if I die?" Interpretation is turned over to Spielvogel: "But this of course you understand, this of course is your bread and your butter."

Somehow, even as the Jewish Mother joke turns into gallows humor and Portnoy the fanatic sounds strident and shrill, Roth's brilliant writing doesn't waver. Great splashes of comic color explode on a dull nudnick backdrop. *Portnoy's Complaint* is maybe the funniest American book ever, and one of the saddest. The comic screams against the actually ordinary, and makes it as real as Portnoy's complaint makes Sophie.

8

What's left is equal time, a punch line for Sophie: "As for my Alex — that little *bonditt* — he wouldn't give up his mother for the world."

Jack Ludwig

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THE ELECTRIC INDIAN

Hard as it is to take Tom Wolfe seriously, whether as stylist or swami of culture, his version of America in the sixties is worth some thought. He himself is a phenomenon of the decade, a journalist whose talents would in any earlier time have been flattened out and institutionalized by the copy editors of *Time* or the *New Yorker* or some lesser slickness; *Esquire* and the *Herald Tribune* in fact brought him to light in their scurrings after new formats and tones, and his mannerism did seem to be what the age demanded. For what must have seemed to him an enchanted few years everyone read and talked about his portraits of freakishness in pop society, the teen-age underworld, the T-shirt cultures of the backlands. Since then the fun of his articles has worn a little thin, but *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, his recent book on the Ken Kesey circle, is a successful new departure in many ways, and I think it's worth asking who we are when we read Wolfe, what version of America and ourselves he makes available.

First a few propositions about his way of operating, for later elaboration. 1) It is pointless to ask what he *means* by it all, what intellectual or moral positions he speaks from. His method proliferates points of view, plays with the reader's prior assumptions, implies attitudes that are then reneged on or thrown away. He is, indeed, a rather cruel caricature of Modernism in action. 2) He always has in mind an audience that's a little less "so" than the person or style he writes about. We are less vulgar than his vulgarians, less hip than his sophisticates, less obsessed than his fanatics, which is to say simply that we are the stereotypical reader of *Esquire* or the *Herald Tribune*, anxious to be in the know about Baby Jane Holzer or stock-car racing or topless shoe-shine girls or the drug scene yet inwardly sure that we know better, just as Wolfe does. 3) But Wolfe has considerable contempt for us for thinking we know better, and he likes to remind us that popular culture, commercial or folk, is a good deal more alive and authentic than the arts and values we think "serious." 4) Thus he pointedly ridicules conventional intellectuality and its ponderous professors, treats politics as a stupid and unreal game, takes social problems to be the fictions of apocalyptic woolgatherers; his avowed message is, "Enjoy, enjoy." 5) But we, his readers, are in his view debarred by age or social status or inherited shibboleths of taste and morality or just plain cowardice from

enjoying what the young, the provincials, the proles (a favorite word) enjoy so directly and innocently. Our pleasure will always be at one remove, vicarious and inevitably a little self-conscious and patronizing. The contradictions in all this are evident and worth exploring.

Youth and Age is, I think, the basic if often subliminal situation Wolfe writes about. Many of his subjects are themselves young, and those who (like Kesey) aren't getting any younger are usually physically imposing, or reckless, or rebellious or adept with machinery, so that they can easily *mean* "youth" to prudent old incompetents. (At worst, they are Falstaffianly *interested* in the young, like Murray the K or McLuhan.) In a larger way, Wolfe sees the received culture itself as old and feeble—*his* people are making their own styles, their own social roles, virtually without regard for the established order, which thus turns out to be not established at all but subject to constant revolutionary change in a time when even children are affluent beyond the dreams of their grandfathers.

This is of course a major subject in the sixties. After two centuries of sentimentalizing childhood, and extending its duration farther and farther beyond puberty, we discover that our young aren't much interested in being children after the old model—though we can then only rather helplessly complain that this is childish of them. To give Wolfe credit, he never talks directly about The Generation Gap, that boring idea; he's interested in how the youth, or the cryptoyouth, go about inventing their own societies, how their styles try to create a felt mutuality and trust, a communal sense of permanence that might withstand the flow of time that keeps sweeping them past whatever the barrier of credibility may be, 30, 25, 19½ or whatever. The young in one another's arms grow older, though neither they nor the indignant scarecrows looking on find this easy to remember, and Wolfe is admirably gentle with them, as he expects us not to be.

But it's not the young themselves, who seem to be doing all right, but the troubled middle-aged reader Wolfe has his eye on most. A climactic moment in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* brings the problem to the surface. At the last of Kesey's acid test parties, when he and his disciples, The Merry Pranksters, are rather showily enacting the transcendent oneness they seek with one another and the All, Kesey's children are brought in by their mother and are quite understandably terrified by this 3:00 A.M. spookiness, from which even tolerably hip grown-ups are fleeing in embarrassed panic:

One of them is crying, only it is like a scream. That's all you hear in here, it's eerie . . . Faye and the kids and Mountain Girl and

Sunshine and all the Pranksters in a tight circle with Kesey. They all hold hands and close their eyes. Silence. Then the scream again
ARCHETYPICAL! MIND POWER!

Then a voice from one of the clumps of people by the wall, some girl, with a spondee voice like a Ouija medium:

"The — child — is — cry-ing — Do — some-thing — for — the — child — first — "

Kesey says nothing. His eyes are shut tight. The high keening sound rises from the circle with the kid's scream weaving through it. *Fantastic mind power crackle* — Goldhill registers the energy

THEY'RE ALMOST

But the girl on the side doesn't let up: "See — about — the — child — A — child — is — cry-ing — That's — all — that's — hap-pening — A — child — is — cry-ing — and — no — one — is — do-ing — any-thing — a-bout — it — "

ALMOST HAVE IT — PRESQUE VU!

" — Why — is — the — child — cry-ing — Doesn't — an-y-bo-dy — care? — "

FEEL IT! THE VIBRATION LEVEL!

Kesey looks up. The spot hits him in the face. The Pranksters release hands. The music starts up. The Anonymous Artists of America play a low rock 'n' roll version of Pomp and Circumstance with drum flourishes . . .

THE ACID TEST GRADUATION

In trying to see what Wolfe wants this elaborately rendered moment to mean, one may first try out simple indignation. We don't like to see small children up too late, especially when they're being bewildered and scared silly by what even some adults found a lurid and grotesque spectacle. There's Dad, dressed up like Captain Marvel in his cape and leotards, doing incomprehensible things and *not even noticing them* and their terror in the night! This reaction, which I suppose few can entirely resist, then feeds into a general dislike and fear of what Kesey was up to, or a dismissal of it all as a simpleminded and gauche excess — like the judge who called him "a childish ass, an egotist who never grew up" and then let him out on bail.

But while Wolfe's vignette lets one get even with Kesey for being such an outrageous freak, it also makes room for an adversary view of "a child is crying." The girl's spondee enunciation seems mechanistic and lifeless (one is invited to wonder what *she* was on), her concern the impersonating of a reflex moralism, her assumption that childish fear overrides any other consideration highly dubious. What if Kesey had been finishing the Sistine Ceiling, saving the world from collision with Saturn, graduating from Yale? — should he then have stopped because his child was crying? What he was doing was important, to him and some others at least, the most important thing he (or maybe any-

one) had ever done; his children should be in on the great moment, even at the expense of their usual schedule and their emotional tranquility, as the children of the Apollo 11 crew were late getting home (and perhaps were cranky?) after seeing Papa fly off to the moon. Some adult purposes may be more adult than others, but it's not the crying child that determines whether Kesey's behavior was shocking or asinine — the girl's most telling remark is not "a child is crying" but "that's all that's happening," which evidently was true for all but Kesey's most devoted followers.

This is not to speculate about Kesey's sanity or moral sense but to find out what Wolfe has in mind for us. At such a moment possibilities of feeling come together in intriguing confusion — the curiously deadened voice of conventional moral sentiment collides with the curiously indifferent intensity of chemical revelation and religious ecstasy, and neither voice can hear the other. But for the Wolfian reader the chips are down, and it may be the last spin of the wheel: the book is ending, and his own kids have been acting a little strangely, come to think of it. "A child is crying" gives him a way out, based not on embarrassing "conventional" disapproval of hippie-drug-fiend-weirdos — he's after all a fairly Liberal guy, really — but on less evidently conventional "human" pity and concern for neglected innocence. Wolfe leaves this door open,

MEMO

FROM: PR

DATE: Oct. 1, 1969

TO: Our readers

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he even paints an Exit sign over it by dwelling on the girl's protests, though one seems to detect some contempt for those who need to use it.

Wolfe's implicit drama of generational conflict is a drama of opposing styles in an affluent society which organizes itself upon conflicts of taste rather than of class and "interests" in the older sense. His America has succeeded in raising incomes and cheapening goods to the point where every man, from Hugh Hefner to the merest ranch-houser, has the power to create his own material kingdom with himself as absolute monarch and sole arbiter of taste, the "status sphere" (or "statusphere," or "statussphere" — Wolfe keeps changing the spelling) as do-it-yourself Versailles. The teen-age Hair Boys at Harvey's Drive-In dress and coif themselves into charismatic roles like seventeenth-century courtiers, a car-customizer in his garage is a modern Tiepolo, Phil Spector the rock record magnate is at twenty-three the Cellini (or Chesterfield, or Jefferson or Rossetti) of teen-age America. Instant Max Weber is less intrusive in Wolfe's later writing, but he's always alert to the symbolism of role-playing in the subcultures he describes, and the word "Sociology" on the back cover of the paperback edition of *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* is a fair enough guide to the drugstore book buyer.

The jokes lurking in his own roles are perfectly evident to Wolfe, and he's well aware that others see the world differently. In the preface to *The Pump House Gang* he bemusedly describes his participation in a symposium (at Princeton, of course) on *The Style of the Sixties*, where the other panelists, earnest types like Ginsberg and Günter Grass, kept talking about political oppression, police statism, war, poverty, alienation. "What are you talking about?" I said. "We're in the middle of a . . . Happiness Explosion!" Like McLuhan, whom he has written well about, Wolfe dismisses politics and social issues as one of the old games of square intellectuals, to him invariably objects of scorn and pity. He describes with glee the Pump House surfers visiting the Watts riots "stoned out of their hulking gourds":

Watts was a blast, and the Pump House gang was immune to the trembling gourd panic rattles of the L.A. *Times* black pan-thuhs.¹ Immune! . . . Artie and John had a tape-recorder and decided they were going to make a record called "Random Sounds from the Watts Riots." They drove right into Watts . . . and there was

1 Uninitiated readers will need to know that in Pump House speech "black panther" meant "middle-aged white square," the point being that such often wear black shoes. One wonders if it still means that, even on the beach at La Jolla.

blood on the streets and roofs blowing off the stores and all these apricot flames and drunk Negroes falling through the busted plate glass of the liquor stores. Artie got a nice recording of a lot of Negroes chanting "Burn, baby, burn."

The young tourists were well received by some of the natives ("Come on, man, it's a party and it's free"), though the authorities kept warning them it was all very dangerous. Others had a slightly different experience of random sounds: "a car full of Negroes *did* stop them and say, Whitey, Geed'um, and all that stuff, but one of the guys in Gary's car just draped a pistol he had out the window and the colored guys drove off." Nothing a properly equipped teen-ager couldn't handle.

Now one isn't quite ready to accept Watts as a happiness explosion, and Wolfe's deadpan mimicry of the kids' own argot wonderfully makes available all the irony one can use. But *he* won't use it—indeed, his general view of "serious" social concern makes the passage a virtual endorsement of the attitudes it mimics. It's too good a joke on the cops and the worried burghers of Los Angeles and the L.A. *Times* and the comic-opera Blacks themselves for Wolfe to allow it to turn into a drama of conflicting minds freely and complexly struggling for their own justification. If the guy with the pistol wasn't a little scared, if the Black kids didn't say "Come on, man, it's a party" with some mixture of shame and hatred, I'll eat my hat and Shakespeare's and Tolstoy's too.

But for Wolfe "politics" and all it implies is mere bullshit:

The main trouble with the Vietnam Day Committee was that they couldn't see beyond the marvelous political whoopee they had cooked up. Why should they? From where they were looking in the fall of 1965, they were about to sweep the country. Berkeley, the New Left, the Free Speech Movement, Mario Savio, the Rebel Generation, the Student Revolution, in which students were going to take over the universities, like in Latin America, and drive some fire up the clammy rectum of American life—you could read about it in all the magazines. And if you don't believe it, come here and watch us, Mr. Jones—and so forth.

To this way of seeing it, it was a howling joke for Kesey and the Pranksters to show up in uniforms, with guns and the Bus fixed up like a tank and all that stuff, and a pity that the Hell's Angels didn't make the scene after all; but one who thinks the rhetoric of protest is often pompous and self-congratulating may still think Kesey's own rhetoric on that day pretty witless too ("There's only one thing to do . . . there's only one thing's gonna do any good at all. . . . And that's everybody just look at it, look at the war, and turn your backs and say . . . Fuck

it. . ."). The open irony Wolfe withholds from the Pump House Gang isn't withheld from the Vietnam Day Committee, and for one who finds the evanescence of other styles an attraction and a confirmation of his sociology he takes an oddly stern view of the evanescence of *political* styles, which by the way don't look quite so different in the fall of 1969 from the way they did in the fall of 1965, whatever he wants to pretend.

I blame Wolfe not for thinking public concerns trivial or fraudulent — that is sometimes salutary and necessary — but for insinuating that the reader in the suburbs or wherever is somehow supported in *his* essential indifference to social justice by the very different indifference of the teen-agers and proles and the deracinated impressarios who manipulate and use them. Not that Wolfe's devices aren't cunning. He's interested in power, not as a political possession but as a personal one; his heroes, as I said earlier, are usually men of impressive physical or psychic force, strong men who have mastered difficult skills or powerful machines like motorcycles or souped-up cars and whose personal style claims an indifference to fear or the complex social delicacies. And this image grabs the respectable reader quite literally by the balls:

the genteel suburban kid rides his bicycle over to the gas station and there in the grease pit area where they lubricate the cars the hard rocks are hunkered down telling jokes about pussy, with an occasional clinical reference to bowel movements and crepitation. And oh christ don't you remember their forearms with the basilic veins wrapped around them like surgical tubes, gorged with the unattainable lower-class hard-rock power that any moment is going to look up and *spot* us . . . genteel little pudding kids.

Well, yes, this is a pretty good and acute joke as far as it goes, but I doubt that it explains quite as much as it seems to. Some intellectuals do hanker after "Low Rent stuff" because it made them feel so scared and sissified in those formative years, some middle-class citizens turn

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conservative because their own nonphysical lives, and the associated fears of sexual inadequacy, make the prole world seem personally menacing. But the point is scored without convincing one that it adequately explains why the Hell's Angels are such troubling objects of thought. Surely they mean more than our adolescent nightmares of impotence.

Wolfe's theory of styles insists that "high styles come from low places," which is to say that there's a vitality in the "low" world that we hunger for but (poor geldings!) can't embrace without proving our absurdity:

Once it was power that created high style. But now high styles come from low places, from people who have no power, who slink away from it, in fact, who are marginal, who carve out worlds for themselves in the nether depths, in tainted "undergrounds." The Rolling Stones, like rock and roll itself and the twist — they come out of the netherworld of modern teen-age life, out of what was for years the marginal outcast corner of the world of art, photography, populated by poor boys, pretenders. . . . Teen-agers, bohos, camp culturati, photographers — they have won by default, because, after all, they *do* create styles. And now the Other Society goes to them for styles, like the decadenti of another age going down to the wharves in Rio to find those raw-vital devils, damn their potent hides, those proles, doing the Tango. Yes! Oh my God, those raw-vital proles!

This is an early attempt, from *The Kandy-Kolored* (etc.) *Baby*, and it doesn't quite work; high styles have been coming from low places a lot longer than Wolfe admits (see Huizinga on the vogue of pastoral in late medieval court circles, for example), and of course low styles come from high places too. Wolfe's instances here — the Rolling Stones and so forth — may come from marginal places, but it seems hard to believe that their arts are very expressive of those origins; surely they're much more expressive of how someone apprehended and used styles and methods that were already part of a thoroughly commercialized cultural ambience, a "business" that already existed and was hungry for new twists on old styles. Wolfe punishes the "Other Society" by doing exactly what he scorns it for doing, sentimentalizing the "netherworlds" below it.

In Kesey Wolfe found a better object for his sociology. Kesey is not prole but the son of a prosperous Oregon businessman, an athletic college boy who adopted Low Rent styles as (in some part) a weapon against his peers, and most of the Pranksters were middle-class drop-outs rather than authentically marginal people. (Their jokes were often pretty literary, their myths founded on snippets from survey courses in

Western — or Eastern — Civilization; some seem to have been getting an allowance from their parents.) Kesey offered physical and psychic strength without raising tricky questions about social origins; the point of the Wolfian hero is not where he comes from but the way in which he invents his style and then lives up to it, and Kesey blessedly was not doing his thing with an eye on *Vogue*, Ed Sullivan or the Top Ten listings. And far more than Wolfe's earlier subjects, Kesey was bright and well aware of the mythic content of his styles, and, despite the painful episode of expecting the Beatles to recognize him as a peer and come to his party, not much interested in *selling* himself outside the circle of his good companions. (He was interested in enlarging the circle, but that's quite different.) And Pranksterism, far from taking its own art and its commercial possibilities seriously, drew heavily on the put-on, the whimsical, pointless, often cruel assaulting of conventional, responsible, "adult" sensibilities — if Kesey's sense of his relation to the "Other World" grew more paranoid as the fuzz closed in, it was all great fun for a while.

Kesey's myth-making used materials familiar to modern teen-age America — school buses, tape recorders, Kool-Aid, cartoon Superheroes like The Flash and Superman — in the service of higher ends, which Wolfe almost accepts as a search for spiritual community through shared religious illumination, the withdrawal of the Aware from the Unaware mass-life all around them. Though he sometimes exploits the fact that many of his readers expected an exposé of Hot Times in Drugsville, the whole effect of *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* is to make the role of acid and grass in the Pranksters' experience seem almost incidental. Drugs were part of their stock of materials, but so were Day-Glo paint and electronic devices and internal combustion engines, and the aims were to them more significant than the instruments used. Wolfe does I think play with a tragic shape in Kesey's career, his growing authoritarian demands, hubris leading to paranoia, the breakdown or death of some of the Pranksters, and we are I suppose free to attribute the pattern to the stuff they were taking, but if the relations between Kesey and his people were affected and in some ways damaged by drugs, they remain recognizable versions of personal relations in a community that seems to have been no more unstable than most straight groups.

And that, I think, is Wolfe's best and trickiest point about America now. The freakiest behavior, the scariest challenge to the *Herald Tribune* world, is only a new permutation of that world, another way of using its materials. Read one way, this is a valuable idea, since it helps explain one's mixed feelings about the Youth Scene, the New People. It's

exciting to see old things put to new purposes, it's about time they were, and yet one wishes the purposes were even newer, the materials a little less junky and apt to break. Those dying generations *do* die, literally, like some of the Pranksters, or just figuratively, drifting back disheveled from the Territory to serve out their time in the old settlements. Read another way, however, Wolfe's point gives aid and comfort to the oldsters it mocks. For all his insistence on the Newness of what he sees, he leaves us free to think it isn't really *that* new, not quite so scary as it seems. Wolfe remarks that there was some of the air of an Old Style college weekend, or a summer camp, about the Pranksters and their doings, and we can thus reflect that the alcohol scene of *our* youth (whenever that was) was pretty wild and silly and violent and self-destructive and pathetic too, though of course we dressed a little neater and had to work harder for sex. Whether or not he believes it—who can say?—Wolfe caters to this hopeful idea, and I'm afraid too many good people secretly entertain it. We won't learn much from the Pranksters, or any of Wolfe's lesser creatures, if we think they're only differently costumed versions of the kids down at the old Tappa Keg House; and if that is really all they are, it's a great pity.

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CONTEMPORARY NONSENSE

An Air Force major has been suspended after allowing three men described as having dangerous psychiatric problems to guard a secret nuclear weapons base in a San Francisco suburb.

Major Tidwell said he had kept the three men on duty because without them "people from the Haight-Ashbury" would try to get the weapons.

(*New York Times*, August 17, 1969.) Contributed by Gene Chavkin, Queens, New York.

Edward J. Cook, a Washington developer has told a zoning hearing here that the super-secret National Security Agency at Ft. Meade employs about 2000 persons.

Cook then was asked whether he got the figure from NSA officials.

"Oh, no," he replied. "I tried there first, but they wouldn't disclose it, so I called the Russian Embassy, and they told me."

(*Washington Post*, June 12, 1969.) Contributed by Ashley Bullitt, Washington, D. C.

"If the starfish population explosion continues unchecked, the result could be a disaster unparalleled in the history of mankind."

—Dr. Richard Cheshier, marine scientist in charge of antistarfish zap squad.

(*New York Times*, July 21, 1969.) Contributed by D. Justice, Ridge-wood, New Jersey.

Projecting a more austere future defense posture, the Presidential decisions would:

¶ Shift the emphasis of America's military capabilities to fight only one major war and one brush-fire war at a time, instead of following the two major and one minor war doctrine that has underlain defense planning for the last decade.

(*New York Times*, October 19, 1969.) Contributed by Barbara Friedberg, New York, New York.

Editor's Note: We'd like to remind our readers that they are invited to send in examples of nonsense. A free subscription to PR will be awarded for each contribution used. In case of a tie, single copies will be sent to the late comers.

AUSTIN, TEX. (UPI)—Studying piano discourages marijuana smoking and rioting, according to Dr. Irl Allison, the founder of the National Guild of Piano Teachers.

A poll of the teachers of participants in the 40th annual National Piano-Playing Auditions “shows not one of the 76,000 participants has been found to smoke marijuana or to riot,” Dr. Allison said.

This is because piano students, “confined to a private practice room under the supervision of a private piano teacher, had more time for meditative thought,” and because “concentration on the works of great musical composers uplifts the piano student,” Dr. Allison continued. (*New York Times*, May 25, 1969.) Contributed by Barbara Friedberg, New York, New York.

“USS PEACE TOUR” URGED BY MURPHY

WASHINGTON, Sept. 18 (UPI)—Sen. George Murphy (R., Calif.) has proposed that the battleship New Jersey, just retired from Vietnam service, be painted white, renamed the *USS Peace* and sent around the world on a goodwill mission.

He said she should carry the “implements” of peace such as the Declaration of Independence, some moon rocks and a modern American kitchen.

“She could be displayed in ports around the world,” Murphy said, “to give graphic evidence by her size, and by her potential for destruction, of the powerful forces at the command of this country.”

(*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 19, 1969.) Contributed by Ens. Stephen White USNR, Pensacola, Florida.

ATLANTIC CITY, Sept. 29—George Meany criticized the Nixon Administration today for what he called its “new Republican Southern strategy. . . .”

Part of the strategy, he suggested, was the nomination of Judge Clement E. Haynsworth, Jr. to the United States Supreme Court.

Mr. Meany noted that an Administration official said recently that there would have been opposition even if the President had appointed one of the 12 Apostles.

The AFL-CIO would not have opposed that appointment, he said.

“Because, if you recall, the 12 Apostles were the friends of the meek and the humble, of the little people, and if they had any wealthy friends, that fact does not appear in the New Testament,” Mr. Meany said.

(*New York Times*, September 30, 1969.) Contributed by Julia Long, Tallahassee, Florida.

HEADLINERS

NIXON'S BRAND OF QUAKERISM DE-EMPHASIZES PACIFICISM

(*New York Times*, January 26, 1969.)

NIXON HOPES YOUTH TURNS TO RELIGION

(*New York Times*, April 28, 1969.)

PRESIDENT TO ASK TAX CUT IN UPPER-INCOME BRACKET

(*New York Times*, July 27, 1969.)

NIXON BARS WIDE HUNGER DRIVE; SHORT RANGE MEASURES PLANNED

(*New York Times*, May 1, 1969.)

(Contributed by William Mather Boardman, New York, N. Y.)

ILLITERACY CONSIDERED NATION'S No. 1 EDUCATION PROBLEM

(*New York Times*, October 11, 1969.)

COMING AND GOING

For years alienation has been the favorite catchword of the American literary establishment, as triangulated by the *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, and the *New York Review of Books*. What they mean is that since they lost their jobs in Army Intelligence after the war, the ruling circles of American society have forgotten they exist and no longer ask them out.

("Alienation," by Kenneth Rexroth. *Arts in Society*, Spring/Summer, 1969.)

"Pusey was doing the right thing, but he was doublecrossed by his faculty, [Hayakawa said]. . . . Hayakawa still speaks with open bitterness of the "cultural snobbery" of faculty members who supported the students, as their counterparts across the continent at Harvard are doing. . . . "There's an unconscious cultural snobbery on the part of the college-educated against those who are not college-educated," he said, "a deep-rooted prejudice among some intellectuals that they are a superior order of being because they are intellectuals. Some of them believe the world has no damn business being run by politicians, generals and businessmen. They think it should be run by literary critics and philosophers." With a wry grin, Hayakawa said Plato, who advocated rule by philosopher-kings, was "the first and most brilliant example of the disgruntled intellectual. If he were alive now, he'd have been president of our campus chapter of the AFT." . . .

(*Washington Post*, April 18, 1969.)



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(Continued from Page 338)

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